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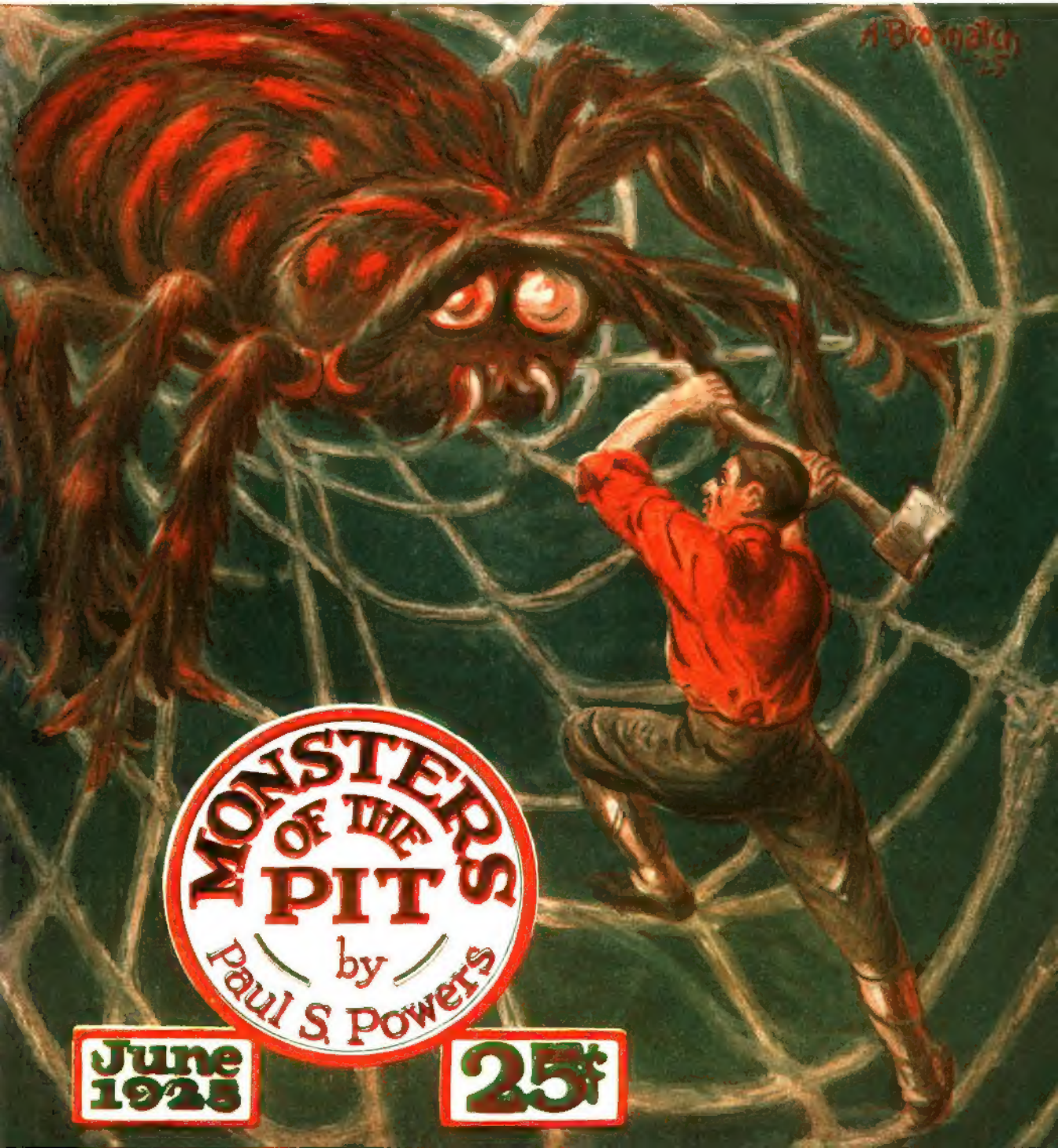

MONSTERS OF THE PIT

by Paul S. Powers

June 1925

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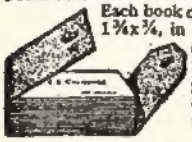

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MONSTERS OF THE PIT

by Paul S. Powers

HOW did I lose my left arm? Well, gentlemen, I have felt that question coming for a long time, and to tell the truth about the matter, I rather dreaded it. For, as well as I have grown to know you during these lonesome nights at the club, I never thought the time would come when I could unburden my mind. I don't expect that you will believe me, either you, Bronson, or Roberts, here. I tried to tell the story once before, to a French doctor at Port Said. He laughed at me first, and thought me insane afterwards. I won't blame you for doing the same. Sometimes I hardly believe the story myself. It seems more like a nightmare than a reality. But here's the proof, gentlemen—this poor stump that once was a fairly serviceable left arm. It looks like a neat surgical operation, doesn't it? But it took my wife three hacks to get it off.

Waiter! Bring the vermouth! There, thank you. You look startled, gentlemen. Perhaps you'd better have a drop of the wine to take the chill of the London fog from your bones. Beastly night, outside. No, I wasn't joking, Bronson, and if you'll be so good as to hand me a cigarette, I'll tell the tale—spin the yarn, as you Americans put it. You won't believe the story, but that makes little difference. I think there is a little saying in your country: "If you believe it, it's true."

It happened four years ago when I was down at Port Said with the engineering company. I was a single man, then, with not a thought in the world other than to take my good money while I could get it, and to get out when there was no more to be had. It was good pay, but rotten work in a rottener country. The town wasn't bad for a headquarters, but it was the trips into the interior that broke us down—from the chief engineer to Tubbs, the youngest apprentice. A year or two and the average man was done, in that country. I saw three white men sent back to the coast on litters, and two more went back in a more gruesome condition. When it wasn't the fever it was the insects, and usually it was both. The snakes and the flies weren't so bad, for a man can kill them, or some of them, but I'll never forget the breath of those awful swamps nor the touch of those ungodly creeping things that were bound to be in your boots in the morning and on your cot at night.

Well, it was half way across the nigger country that stretches between the company offices and Suakin. There

were seven of us white men and a party of blacks. One of the black boys, however, I really grew to like and trust. He knew the country, the desert, and the jungle; and he knew mules. He was in charge of the string we had with us. Kali was this remarkable fellow's name, and I suppose I am the only one who now remembers it.

Can you imagine seeing a beautiful English girl in a filthy native town in the depths of Africa? I couldn't either, until I saw her. Gad! She was white, and young! When I met her in that market place, with a basket on her arm and dressed like a nun, I got the biggest thrill of my life. She was about eighteen, and though I didn't see the beauty of her at the time, I was shocked beyond words. I learned afterward that I was the first Englishman she had ever seen, with the exception of her father—but more of that later. Just that glimpse was all I had, that day, but it was enough to set me thinking.

The chief only laughed when I reached the camp with the news, but the chief was a steady old blighter with grandchildren in Southsea, so I didn't wonder. It was the same when I told the other men—they thought I had been drinking. But it was true, and of course I asked Kali.

"Why, that is the daughter of the dread father, the mad white man," he winked over the cigarette I had given him. "But no—all white men are mad."

"And who," I asked, "is this white man?"

"A learned man," grinned Kali, "but mad, all the same. He was here when my father was as I am, and even then he was mad. If he was not mad, would he creep in the swamps and in the sand, even as the insects?"

"But how does he live?"

"Ah, he has gold—English gold. Two times, sometimes three times a year, he goes to the coast and brings back all manner of strange things. Wanaki, one of his blacks, once told me that he brought back devils in tiny bottles, from the English ships. To uncork the bottles means death—a terrible swelling death. Wanaki told of his devils and how a black boy died even as cattle die from the cobra. But there was no snake—there was only a white powder."

"Does the girl go with him on his trips to Port Said?"

"If she had, Wanaki would have told me. The girl child is made to stay with the black women. The white man is mad, and if you take the advice of Kali you will forget the white child woman in the long black dress."

Kali looked very wise indeed, and I believe he wanted another cigarette. I cursed him sourly and left him to his mules.

The sight of the woman had set something loose within me. You know well how it is in the wilderness, and it had been long weeks since we had left Port Said. To be sure, there were women there—of a kind. I wanted to know this girl, at least to learn something of her history. Kali's gossip had aroused my curiosity, though I did not believe him. Kali's great sin was his love for talk and his hatred for bare facts. But I vowed to see the girl again.

I'll pass over briefly the days that followed. The very afternoon following my talk with Kali I saw her again, but only a glimpse and she was gone. Then several days passed, and during them I learned more about the girl and her father. His name was Denham, a doctor, it appeared, with several letters tacked after his name—a scientist. Those were all the facts I could gather, and what he was doing and had been doing the past twenty years was a mystery. Collecting bugs? Possibly. But Kali and the blacks swore that it was more than that—by the burial pits of their fathers it was more than that. He was a devil-devil doctor, and made the

milk of the cows turn sour. He was a man-witch who poisoned the swamps, and talked with the spiders at evil hours of the night. He was also a number of other undesirable things, according to the superstitious Kali, who continued to divulge more or less valuable information over my cigarettes.

Then came the day when I met the girl face to face. And that day I learned more than ever before, though what I heard scarcely satisfied me.

THE girl was timid, and though she permitted me to walk with her a short distance, I left her more disturbed than before. Yes, she said, she was English, though born in Africa. She had never seen England, having been no farther than Port Said, and then only once, when a mere baby. Her mother? She did not remember her mother, and she had never heard the English tongue spoken except by her father. This was practically all she told me, but it made me long to hear more.

On that short walk with her I learned several important details, not the least important of which was the fact that she was even prettier than I had at first supposed. And she had been well educated—the professor evidently was an excellent teacher—and she had mentioned books, many books. The next morning I was waiting in the market place.

She came. It was more than I had hoped. Why bore you with details, gentlemen? I met her again and again, and grew to know her better than myself. Yes, I was in love, and beyond that there's no explanation needed, I'm sure.

We talked of many things during that first short week of our acquaintance, and on one subject only was she elusive: her father. Of her father only, she would not speak. When I spoke of him she would turn away with a look on her face much akin to fear. But perhaps I was mistaken. As we grew more intimate it grew upon me that her father, even if he was the dreadful being Kali had made him out to be, was at least a wonderful scholar. I could read it in this child. She was wonderful. In most respects she astounded me with her learning, and then at other times she would show an ignorance that was pathetic. The man she called father had molded her mind to suit his will, but there is that something about a woman's mind, gentlemen, that no earthly cunning can twist from its course. I began to read it in her eyes that she cared for me more than her innocence knew. I haven't told you her name. It was Irene Denham.

"I would like very much to meet your father," I ventured, one evening. "Doesn't he know that you are meeting me here?"

She hesitated.

"I have told him of you, Scott," she admitted. "And—well, he doesn't exactly approve. Of course it's because he doesn't know you," she added, hastily, "but when I suggested that you visit us at our home on the veldt, he was very angry. Father is like that—sometimes I think he hates all white men. I think it's because he's so wrapped up in his work, the work he has been carrying on for twenty years. But tomorrow, Scott, if you will come—"

I shook my head.

"Not if he disapproves of it," I began, and then I had a sudden thought. I would go, and moreover, I would come to an understanding with this man. Surely I had the right, at least, for I was determined to take Irene back to England with me. There was no other course open—I would see Professor Denham, and see him the very next day. I told the girl of my plans—and, well, gentlemen, I won't go into details—but she accepted them. I would meet her in the dirty little market place the next morning, we agreed, and would accompany her home.

I FOUND Kali very much worried that night, and when I pressed him for further information, and told him that I was planning to visit Professor Denham the next day, he told me blunty that I would soon die.

"Nonsense, Kali," I laughed. "Why, I expect to find a respectable old naturalist and a fine collection of ants and butterflies. He's harmless. In my country no one is ever frightened at their doings. He's what is called a scientist, Kali."

"One of the black fellah boys from beyond the village told me to watch my mules," answered Kali. "He told me, also, that the white witchman has been stealing his cattle. What does he do with the cattle? He takes them into dark pits within his great stone house. Tell me, do butterflies eat cattle?"

I was getting very angry, and could have taken the impudent black scoundrel by the throat with pleasure.

"Hold your tongue!" I commanded, but when I left his hut Kali was smoking one of my cigarettes, all the same. This really was getting interesting. On the morrow, I told myself, I would know just how much Kali had lied. At the time I put the whole story down as the product of Kali's vivid, if not convincing, creative imagination. I was in love. The next morning, *the* morning, I varnished my boots carefully, and put on my best khaki breeches. I would have given a small fortune for the white linen ones of the chief engineer, but I didn't dare ask him for them. It was hard enough to get away for the day.

IRENE was at our rendezvous, and I received the thrill of my life when I saw that she had discarded her nun-like dress for one more fitting to the occasion. It seemed to me to be rather a makeshift affair, but it became her —it brought out beauty that I had not thought her to possess. She was a man's woman, was Irene!

"I don't know why, dear, but I dread the meeting between you and father," she murmured.

We had left the village and were climbing a baking sand dune.

"It won't be so bad," I said, cheerfully. "My education hasn't been along the same lines as your father's, and perhaps he won't be interested in me, yet perhaps we shall have some things in common. A white man, you know, is a white man, and even Africa can't change him. I'll wager you that the first question he asks me is, "Have you an old *London Times* with you?'"

"White men have been near the village before," insisted the girl. "Never has he admitted them to our home, although one was a scientist like him—an explorer. I believe he hates all men—all mankind. True, he finally gave permission to bring you, but I'm afraid—"

"Does he love—you?" I asked.

"I don't know. There was a time when I was sure he did, just as there were times when he would bring flowers from our garden and put them upon my mother's grave, but for many years he has been changed. He hates the world—he plans to destroy—"

She did not finish the sentence, but stopped as if a cold hand had been laid across her red lips. She paled, and I saw that she was trembling. When I pressed her for an explanation, she changed the subject with a frightened, pathetic smile. From that moment on I felt that a chill had crept down from the dunes like a breath from the swamps. We walked on in silence.

"There!" she said, when we had reached the top of a little hillock, "There is—home."

Home! So this was her home! A melancholy house of stone, crumbling like an ancient ruin. It seemed strangely out of place here in this desolation. It belonged to Carthage, or perhaps to some long dead city.

And this child lived here! I shuddered, even though the heat was flickering in waves across the distant veldt.

Her steps became slower, as we approached, and she seemed to be laboring under a clutching fear. I remember that the few cheerful and rather idiotic remarks I made fell flat, and truly I was in no mood for jesting.

As we neared the house I could see half a dozen black slaves working about the *kraal*, but I could see no sign of life within the house. It was fearfully hot, and far, far to the east I thought I could make out the distant line of the sea, but I knew it was a mirage.

WELL, I met Dr. Denham. We had entered the coolness of the hallway, and as I stood wondering what fashion of man it was who had furnished this dreary place so well, I saw a smiling face peering at us from beyond the draperies.

"Mr. Scott, I presume?"

A soft voice, and it fitted the man. In the semi-darkness which was the nearest approach to comfort in sweltering British East Africa, I saw Irene's father. A man of fifty, perhaps, smooth-shaven and neatly dressed in white. The mouth under his rather hooked nose was curved into a smile, and yet, somehow, I felt chilled. No smile of welcome that! Not that there was anything alarming about the doctor's appearance, for he was nearly as I had pictured him, with his scholarly spectacles and abstracted manner. A naturalist and scientist, he looked his part. I bowed.

"I am very glad to know you, Professor Denham," I said, and extended my hand.

That handclasp was like ice! Denham's skin was repulsively cold and moist, like that of a bloated leech. I shuddered, and looked at the man closely.

The eyes! The heavy lenses of his glasses failed to utterly conceal the serpentine power of those greenish eyes. They were at once the eyes of a hypnotist and snake charmer. Though the professor was smiling with his thin lips, the eyes remained icy and the skin across his lofty brows was wrinkled into a frown. I remember that he made a few commonplace remarks and invited me inside. Dinner, he said, would soon be served. He was happy to have an Englishman for his guest. Yes, it *was* lonely here, but he was fond of loneliness. All the time he was talking I could not keep my eyes from his face. There was some mystery here—some strange secret in this man's life. And Irene knew of it, for I remembered that little slip she had made while we were crossing the sands. She was worried now, and she was watching her father with mingled fear and apprehension, if I read aright.

At dinner, which was served by a good-looking black, the professor talked of many things. Did I like the country? When did I expect to return to Cairo and Port Said? He asked many questions, and for the first time since I met him I felt at ease. Perhaps I had been mistaken, after all. First impressions do not always furnish one with a character guide. I warmed up, and we talked until late afternoon, over our wine. I was just about to come to the point, and tell him the real reason for my journey there, when he asked me to look at his specimens.

"Something that you'll find interesting, Mr. Scott, I'm sure," he smiled. "I doubt if you've ever seen anything like them. It has taken years for me to perfect my plans, and it is only recently that I have had any success. Do you know anything of bacteriology?"

"Very little," I confessed. "From what your daughter told me I thought your experiments were confined to insects. I did not know that bacteriol-

ogy, too, was a hobby of yours, doctor."

He eyed me sharply.

"It's more than a hobby," he said, "as you will soon see. As for insects, well, you will see my insects—later."

I felt much like telling him that he need not go to that trouble. Creeping things had always horrified me, and I had seen quite enough of them since I had been working in Africa. However, it was my plan to keep him in a good humor until we could reach an understanding, so I followed him into a distant portion of the great house.

"As far as bacteria are concerned," I told him, "I haven't even as much as peeped into a microscope."

Professor Denham laughed.

"Microscope!" he leered. "You won't need a magnifying glass to see my collection!"

Was the man mad? I felt a chill creep over me.

We had reached a sort of laboratory, and the professor withdrew a cloth from a glass case. I looked over his shoulder, then, and received one of the shocks of my life. What were these horribly squirming things? Not insects, for never in my dreams had I pictured things like these! They were writhing like maggots in a substance that appeared to be a sticky gelatin. Some of them resembled scorpions, but most of them were rod-shaped things the size of my little finger. They were moving, moving—never still.

"What—what are they?" I stammered in an awed voice.

"Bacilli," chuckled the doctor.

"You mean germs—of disease?" I asked, horrified.

"Exactly! What do you think of my work? I have multiplied them a million times, in size. Some of those organisms literally breathe death. It has taken me twenty years to find the secret, and do you know what it means? I am lord of the world!"

It was devilish, and I longed to get out of the room. This man was mad, surely, yet here was the hideous proof before me.

"There they are," went on the scientist, with a horrible smile. "There they are till I am ready to use them, safe in the glass case and in a culture medium of agar agar."

I wiped the cold sweat from my face, and told him that I had seen quite enough and was ready to leave.

"Not until you have seen the most interesting specimens in my exhibit of insect life," smiled the professor. "I wouldn't have you miss that, for worlds."

I wanted to tell him that I wouldn't see another sight like those writhing things in his laboratory for worlds, either, but I followed him from the room and into a corridor. A huge black was waiting for us there.

"Well, Sahem?" asked the professor, in a harsh metallic voice.

The black giant showed his teeth in a look of anxiety.

"The slaves, master," he muttered. "They threaten to fly. They are afraid, and even the cattle whip cannot make them stay longer. Some of them will talk, unless—"

The doctor whipped a revolver from his blouse and handed it to the great negro.

"Tell them that I will have them thrown into the great pit," he snarled, "if they breathe a word! Kill them, Sahem, if they do not obey; and as for yourself, if you make one slip, the black pit will yawn for your carcass also!"

The slave's face twitched with fear, and it was nearly livid when he bowed to the ground and backed out of the dank passage on his hands and knees. Before I had time to recover from my astonishment a terrible sound echoed at my feet. It was an agonized bellow, ending in a gurgling wail, and it seemed to come from a cavern under the house. The hair tightened on my scalp at that fearful sound—the death

sound of some animal in fear and pain. For a moment I heard it and then it died suddenly away into silence.

"My God!" I whispered, "what was that?"

"I fancy," smiled the professor, cheerfully, "that it was an ox."

Kali's weird tale flashed through my head. Perhaps the talkative black man had not lied so much, after all. There was a deeper mystery here than I had at first imagined, and for the moment my curiosity was stronger than my dread. While I followed the bobbing form of the scientist up the passage, I turned over in my mind all I had seen and heard. Again I seemed to see those horrible squirming things in the glass case, and once more I seemed to hear that awful wail. An ox! How long would this distorted nightmare last?

"Now, if you'll be so good," murmured the professor, "we will look over my collection of insects."

He had reached a trap-door and was tugging at the rope that raised it. It suddenly yawned open and I saw the first steps of a staircase leading somewhere down into the dark.

"We'll just leave the door open, so we can see," said the scientist, and he led the way cautiously down the wooden steps. With some misgiving I followed, keeping close to his back. The death cry of the ox still rang in my ears and I determined not to lose sight of my guide. Three steps, then four, then five. At that moment I heard steps on the passage above, and a second later saw Irene's white face framed in the square opening at my head.

"Oh, Scott," she whispered. "Come back—come back!"

Even as the words left her lips I saw a great black hand placed over her mouth, and caught a glimpse of the giant negro, his face distorted by a scowl of rage and fury. I leaped up the steps, and as I did so, down came the trap with a bang and I found myself scuffling in the dark with the professor.

I fought furiously, and was overpowering the wiry little fiend, when I felt myself hanging over the edge of a black void. Something seemed to whirl me closer and then I fell, with the doctor's insane laugh ringing in my ears.

Something strangly yielding broke my fall, something that felt like a suspended mass of silken rope. For a moment I was held there, and as the trap-door was opened above me, I saw the face of the professor looking down at me from above. So this was the pit! I struggled, and tried to wrench myself free from the tangling bands that bound me, for Irene's suppressed cry still echoed in my brain. In vain I tried to tear myself loose, and then, as my eyes grew accustomed to the faint light, I ceased. The silken strands that grasped my arms and legs were as large around as my thumb, and held me like so much steel. The professor was leaning over the edge of the pit. He was speaking, and his voice was quivering with rage.

"Fool! Miserable fool!" he mocked. "So you sought to steal my daughter, did you? And she the future princess of the world! I know your kind, and now I can watch you die. Soon you will see my collection of *insects!*"

And then in the distant corner I could see a huge pair of phosphorescent eyes staring at me through the gloom—then another pair and another! They seemed to appear as if by magic from some dark recess within the pit. Then I saw what covered the floor of the place! Bones! Bones of cattle and of sheep! And in the maze of ropy threads about me hung the carcass of a great ox! I was being held in nothing less than the web of a monstrous spider!

I SCREAMED, and as an echo to the scream I heard the throaty laugh of the demented man in the gallery. *Insects!* God! Great bloated spiders, foul and gigantic, were watching me from their awful lairs! Again I struggled to wrench myself away, but I fell exhausted. Then I saw the hideous monsters begin slowly to advance, and I felt the web tremble as if something of great weight was gliding upon it.

Above me and to the right was one of the ghastly spiders. I saw its multiple eyes watching me as it paused. Fangs, shining like polished ebony, protruded beneath those terrible eyes, and when I saw the thing perched on the great web ready to pounce upon me, I cried out in horror. The web shook again, and I closed my eyes and waited for the dreadful impact. Even now, gentlemen, the sight of a fly buzzing his wings in a spider's web makes me sick and weak. Why I did not faint then, I don't know. Perhaps I was too terror-stricken.

I believe the monster would have leaped at that instant had it not been for a cry on the other wall of the pit. At the sound I began to hope again. It was Irene.

She was descending by a ladder, under a large trap on the other side, doubtless the one through which the ox had been cast. In her hand was an ax.

"Leave me!" I shouted, sick with fear for her safety. "You cannot save me! Back! Back!"

But she came, and I saw the terrible thing above me turn on its great legs, and watch her. At that second I heard a yell of fury from the professor. He was descending a rope ladder on the other side of the pit, and was foaming with rage.

The great spider had faced me again, and I could feel its legs rasp against the web that held me. I saw that the monster was covered with hair, like a huge bear, though no bear was ever so disgustingly sickening as this dreadful thing. I felt like a helpless fish about to be seized by a bloated octopus. Yet once again it hesitated, as if not knowing whether to turn on Irene or the professor.

Irene reached me first, and her ax whistled through the air at my feet as she cut me loose from the tenacious web. As she did so the hideous monster leaped at her! Like a steel trap and with terrible ferocity, the spider sprang, only to meet Irene's ax.

The keen edge of the tool sank into its horrible flesh. I wrenched the weapon from Irene's hand and finished the awful thing—saw it writhe out its death struggle, entangled by its own web. I struck again and again, and then threw aside the ax with a feeling of nausea and disgust. Irene clung to me and sobbed.

"Quick!" I cried, as I tore my eyes away from the throes of the monster I had killed. "Your father—look!"

The unfortunate professor was pinned under the dreadful body of another spider. It had sprung upon him while I was occupied with my own troubles.

Seizing the ax, I dashed toward him, taking care to avoid the treacherous web. I struck at the insect of hell with all my strength, and it turned upon me savagely. I saw those awful fangs poised above me as I struck again upward with the ax. My blow landed squarely, but it was too late to avoid the knifelike poison tubes. Something swept into my left hand like a razor, just as the dying and distended body of the spider bore me to the ground. I felt a fetid, cold breath on my neck and something flabby and soft seemed to encircle my chest. For a moment I lost consciousness.

The next thing I remembered was the sense of a great weight being removed from my body. I groaned, and sat upright. Irene helped me to my feet, and she was calm, though the dead body of the professor lay not

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THE DEVIL-GOD

by Frank Belknap Longh

Author of "The Ocean Leech," "Men Who Walk Upon the Air," etc.

"BUT a man's head is such a little thing!"

Mpatanasi smiled and stroked his brittle yellow beard. His daughter sat in the corner and scowled. She was silent through sheer indignation.

"Mu-senyui, I did not ask for philosophy. A man's head is his own, and who am I to rob a man of his property? Still, were I certain—"

"But I assure you that the wretch abuses his head frightfully. He has little use for it. And when you consider that it is a king's head that he abuses!—Mpatanasi, who is a just man, may well consider!"

Mpatanasi blew circles of yellow smoke into the thin air, screwed up his lips and studied the disintegrating rafters above him. A squalid procession of bluish bat ticks wound in and out over a balcony of lianas. Mpatanasi was a tall, lean man, with the malachite sky in his eyes and the sun in his hair. His lips were monstrous and they seemed to overlap his face; and his ears were distended by wooden plugs. He was naked to the waist, but he wore a straw hat and a flaming red four-in-hand, which did not become him. He sat by the open door, and puffed on a ridiculous pipe, and blinked at Mu-senyui.

"I shouldn't feel justified in asking for a king's head," he said, and made a grimace.

His daughter beat a horrified and irrelevant tattoo upon the soles of her burnished feet.

Mu-senyui was reprehensibly and gloriously drunk. He fell into a revery, and later, upon the floor. The frown on his face grew in volume. It would never do, of course, to deliberately antagonize Mpatanasi. Mpatanasi entertained men with magnificent jests and well-turned figures of speech, and sent them away with their heads under their arms. Was not Mpatanasi emissary of the forest-god, and did he not hold in his shriveled black hands the key to a dozen enigmas? Even the king feared Mpatanasi, and it was because of a king's fear that Mu-senyui had dared to suggest—oh, the days and nights that poor, tired Mu-senyui had schemed under the shadow of blasphemy, with his soul knee-deep in sin, and with his eyes turned nervously toward the forest! For Mpatanasi was master of the forest; and as Mu-senyui was a man of taste he did not care to face what the forest concealed.

But Mu-senyui, because of the greatness of his love, comforted himself with a truism.

"It is better," he reflected, "to kiss the full, indescribable lips of Mpatanasi's daughter than to face the forest-devil! It is more comfortable—but, if necessary, I shall face the god! A woman is worth many monsters!"

It is difficult to forgive Mu-senyui for reasoning so platitudinously, but Mpatanasi's daughter had addled his wits.

Mpatanasi took the pipe out of his mouth and knocked out a thimbleful of bluish ashes.

"I should hardly feel justified in demanding a king's head—but, are you sure that he abuses his head?"

Mu-senyui was sure of it.

"Only this morning," drawled Mu-senyui, with an amazing note of triumph in his voice, "only this morning he made little poems out of his head, and sang them to the women. The poems were treasonous!"

Mpatanasi sat up very stiff and straight and asked Mu-senyui what sort of poems were not treasonous. "Do you think," he said, "that any man in his right mind would make silly little rimes on pieces of blank paper? I do not care who or what the man is, if he sits about and reads, his days and nights will be filled with wo. The torture of the sixty-seven stripes would be a most excellent remedy. I wonder—"

"But Mpatanasi would not torture a king!"

"That is true. Mpatanasi has not fallen so low. There is but one way to bring him to reason—we must have his head!"

"Mpatanasi has said it!"

"Not yet. But call in the chanters and I shall pronounce a doom."

Mu-senyui, smiling broadly, backed to the door and disappeared. The daughter of Mpatanasi concealed her face with her hands, and no one saw the hideous breadth of her grin.

Mpatanasi walked out into the cool of the morning, and stretched his long, scraggy arms toward the summer sky. His face twitched convulsively and his knees trembled. He did not want to pronounce a doom. He was a man of peace, and he loved quiet and the soothing sounds of the forest; the tireless drone of millions of jade-green insects, the swish, swish, swish of the great aloe palms as they swayed in the wind against the white, agitated dawn, and the shrill screams of naked children baking and blistering in the sun. The turmoil of the forest was a sweet music to him, and he loved to watch the multicolored parrakeets, and the rich red lips of orchids that seemed alive. He disliked the pronouncing of dooms, and he disliked his chorus of old women that put the seal of the forest-devil upon all dooms and made them irrevocable.

But he knew that he could not escape, for his words were necessary and would accompany men's souls on their last, long, tedious journey, and he was but the instrument of the forest-devil and the slave of his own words. The words that he pronounced were lethal words, and they carried weight, and wo to the man or woman who put them lightly aside.

As Mpatanasi stood in the clearing in front of his small, round dwelling, and watched the half-nude, swaying procession of black forest-women advance leeringly and mockingly from between the bifurcated boles of incredibly ancient trees, he lost all sense of immediate time and place. The universe existed for him no longer: he became a divine machine, a pronouncer of dooms, an emissary of the forest-god.

His eyes glazed, and his lean, black body grew rigid. He ran his hands rapidly through his hair and spat on the ground. The procession of women swayed hideously in the sunlight, and came dancing toward him over the

damp ground. They were the queen's own retinue, and they had been painted and bedecked for the occasion. Their arms and legs were tattooed; white and blue rings encircled their wrists and ankles; and their breasts were covered by monstrous smudges of bluish paint. Their eyebrows had been shaved; and their lips were cracked and swollen, and a few wore plugs through their lips. One played upon a cracked violin, and several of the blackest and most ghastly made music of cymbal and bassoon. They danced and shouted and screamed, and twisted themselves into devious shapes, and struck each other violently with long thongs made of rubber and flax. They were a jolly crew, but Mpatanasi was deep in religious contemplation and saw them only as instruments; or perhaps he did not see them at all.

They formed a circle about him, and began to gibber meaninglessly, and Mu-senyui, who stood at a distance, turned away with white lips.

"But supposing you are responsible!"

Mu-senyui saw the daughter of Mpatanasi standing before him, her thin lips writhing back gloriously from her white teeth. The lips of Mpatanasi's daughter were enticing, even when distorted by ecstatic cruelty, and Mu-senyui thought that a man must be lucky indeed to possess such lips.

"I have prayed that responsibility shall fall upon me as a cloak," he said, patting the daughter of Mpatanasi upon the shoulder. "And why should I reproach myself? You are mad to think that I should reproach myself!"

She drew close to him, and ran her long fingers through his beard. "You are a dear, Mu-senyui! It is horrible to have such a dreadful old man say to you: 'It is not proper to put paint upon your lips! It is not according to the law for a priest's daughter to play upon the bassoon!' He is a terrible old man! But he doesn't suspect, does he?"

"Of course not! He has very little shrewdness. He does not even know that the king—"

The daughter of Mpatanasi laid the second and third fingers of her right hand across Mu-senyui's lips. "Look! Even now he pronounces a doom!"

MU-SENYUI looked out into the clearing, and his fingers tightened on the shoulders of Mpatanasi's daughter. "It is a hideous thing to witness, that doom. It comes straight from the forest-devil, and your father is but an agent—and yet it is your father who pronounces a doom!"

"It is silly of you, my dear, to believe in devils! The forest-god exists only in the imagination of Mu-senyui. My father is a man, and he makes dooms out of his silly old head. Mu-senyui, you have no idea how much I have to put up with!"

Out in the clearing Mpatanasi threw back his head, and bellowed out a terrible doom.

"Mu-senyui," asked Mpatanasi's daughter, with hot shame looking out of her eyes and flushing red over her cheeks and throat; "Mu-senyui, will you describe the forest-devil?"

Mu-senyui swallowed a lump in his throat and his cheeks blanched. "It is impossible to describe the unholy thing in detail. I should prefer simply to state that it is very tall, with one large eye in the center of its forehead, and its lips are swollen and cover the entire lower portion of its face. It is clad in white fur. It has a long neck, square shoulders, and enlongated lower limbs."

"Mu-senyui, do you really believe such nonsense? And if you do, how —how can you explain it?"

"There has always been a forest-devil, as long as the forest has been there, and no one knows when the

forest came—even your grandmother could not tell you that!"

"But Mu-senyui, do you think that father believes?"

"Ah, I am depending upon that. He will never dare to disobey his doom. And, as you suggest, he is a terrible old man!"

Mpatanasi was nearly through. His lips were livid, and his eyes bulged. He swirled about on the tips of his toes, like a top, and droned and chanted, and the words that came from between his lips were ominous and in bad taste: "Let the king die. At night under the moon the king must prepare his bed of death. Let the king lie upon a mat of straw, and let him take his life with a sharp blade—a very sharp blade. Let the knife be sharp, for it must glisten in the moon, and the king must die! The forest-devil is kind; the forest-devil is generous, and he asks that the king die splendidly, in a manner befitting a king. Let the king offer no complaint, for it is good to die! The king has been a bright sun, and we have worshiped him as a god; but the time for our king's death is at hand, and what is glory but a pinch of dust in the nostrils? What is reverence and what is tribute? The reverence that we pay to a king is but as a drop of water glistening on wet leaves under the sun. The sun takes away the moisture from the leaves, as we withdraw our reverence from the king. And tribute is less than reverence, for it springs from fear, and fear is unworthy of us, and it is unworthy of a king. Let the king die!"

The women who remained took up the chant, and danced wildly under the overhanging lianas, and the king was as good as doomed, as anyone with sense could see.

"He is a terrible old man!" said Mpatanasi's daughter.

"I do not blame you a bit," replied Mu-senyui, who stifled a titter of triumph with his hand. "It has turned out precisely as I had arranged it. You will understand later on why I very nearly died of fright a few minutes ago. I was afraid that he would call the king by name, and that would have spoiled everything!"

"But now there is no danger?"

"There is very little danger. It is true that he may not really believe in the forest-devil at all, but—"

The daughter of Mpatanasi cut him short with a kiss. "Once," she said, "I heard him say, 'There are more things in—' "

Mu-senyui laid his hand across her mouth. "I see that you do not hate me! I am glad. I feared that you would not exactly take to my scheme. And yet there was no other way. He was too intolerant, and he would not even let me kiss you!"

"But I should not advise you to kiss me now! You do not seem to have any sense! Can't you see that he has recovered from his doom and that he is watching us?"

MPATANASI had indeed recovered. The women had retreated into the forest, and the sun beat shockingly down upon his bare chest and arms. His eyes were bloodshot, and he kept passing his right hand back and forth before his eyes, as if brushing away cobwebs. He knew that he had pronounced an unusually dreadful doom; and he felt sick and weak.

He staggered across the clearing and held out his arms to his daughter. She came close to him and nestled against his hairy chest. "You are very tired," she said, and winked at Mu-senyui.

Mu-senyui laid his hand softly upon the shoulders of Mpatanasi. "It must have been a great strain—but it was necessary. When a king sits about and does nothing but read poetry the state must protect itself! I hope that you remember your exact words: 'Let the king lie upon a mat of straw, and let him take his life with

a sharp blade!' As you know, the doom is irrevocable—and remember that it refers to none but the king! It is *the king* who must prepare his bed of death at night under the moon!"

Mpatanasi's eyes flashed, and he struck Mu-senyui across the face. "If you are wise, Mu-senyui, you will say no more about it. You have made me pronounce a doom which I shall regret all my life."

Mu-senyui shook like a jellyfish on stilts. His eyes narrowed and a monstrous lump came into his throat. "One little word," he thought, "one little word! If—if! But no, he wouldn't dare!"

The daughter of Mpatanasi took her father by the hand and led him back into the hut. He was sobbing and gibbering and muttering threats against Mu-senyui, and Mu-senyui slunk away between the trees, with a blasphemous fear in his soul.

2

MPATANASI awoke from a dream of parrakeets and moon-lipped orchids to a sense of physical peril. He got awkwardly to his feet and looked about him. The moon was gibbous, and it stood like a disheveled lemur in the center of the clearing, and glazed with its febrile white light the sardonic smile on the face of Mpatanasi's daughter. A strange music filled the air, and a dark, amorphous form stalked splendidly across the doorway, and made no sound under the stars.

Mpatanasi moved noiselessly back and forth before the opening which served as a door, and then he tripped hysterically across the hut on bare feet and sat down beside his daughter. He looked at her for a moment with startled eyes. Her hair ran in rusty torrents down to her knees, and Mpatanasi suddenly realized that he had not guarded her sufficiently and that Mu-senyui could bear watching. He pinched his daughter's arm.

She sat up and looked at him. Then she gave a little scream, and started to get to her feet. But Mpatanasi told her to be quiet, and then he confessed to her that he was afraid—dreadfully afraid. "It is something which doesn't fear the moon," he said.

The daughter of Mpatanasi looked at her father for a moment without comprehending. Then she screamed again. But she didn't really believe in the forest-devil, in her heart of hearts.

But the night seemed to her so awesomely quiet and her father was unquestionably frightened! He got up again, and walked to the opening, and looked out into the night, and studied the gibbous moon. The moon was not a pleasant thing to reflect upon as it stood lonely and corpselike above the twisted, gnarled boles of incredibly ancient trees, but Mpatanasi had lost all fear of the moon. It was the shadow before the doorway which frightened Mpatanasi.

Suddenly Mpatanasi perceived with his large, frightened eyes the form which had cast the shadow across the doorway by the light of the gibbous moon. It crouched on its hands and knees, and its face was turned hideously toward Mpatanasi.

"Oh, it isn't a devil at all!" Mpatanasi's daughter was looking over her father's shoulder and tittering in the moonlight. "It isn't even a monster! It is only stupid little Bamuti. How lovely he looks in the moonlight! Poor little Bamuti with his shaven head and yellow eyes! Bamuti is jaundiced, and he shaves his head so that the women will speak to him. Naughty, naughty Bamuti! He is a very precocious child. He is only twelve, but he has whispered impertinences into the ears of the oldest crone in the queen's retinue. Nothing that goes on in the court escapes Bamuti. Come, child, step inside, and

let us hear what you have to say! But beware of lies, or Mpatanasi will have your head with that of the king!"

BAMUTI stood up in the moonlight, threw back his head and stepped into the tent. He had traveled all night through the forest and his handsome thighs and chest glistened with perspiration. He was clothed in a turkey-red loincloth, and he wore on his shaven head a soft felt hat. His chest was tattooed, and his arms were encircled by rings of ivory, painted green and yellow and black. He held himself erect and looked straight into the impatient eyes of Mpatanasi.

"The queen's women are good to me, and love me. They often take me into their arms and fondle me and kiss me. They are very beautiful and at such times I am happy." He spoke simply, and never removed his eyes from the impatient face of Mpatanasi.

"Well?"

"The day before yesterday the queen called me to her. 'You are very good-looking,' she said. Then she ordered me to make up a pretty speech out of my head and recite it to her. The idea fascinated me and I sat down upon the floor and endeavored to think of something unusual to say to her. Then the king came in and found me there!"

"And of course you were punished!"

"I should have been, but, you see, I am very impulsive. The king seemed so utterly despicable. As you know, it is a really insignificant man, and ugly! He didn't even have the heart to be angry. And I pitied the queen. When a man does not even consider a woman worth fighting for! Well, I decided that the king was unworthy, and so I killed him. There was really very little choice in the matter. I pitied the queen, and when you catch the knife between the first and second ribs there is scarcely any pain. He died beautifully. I held the long knife in my hand and fingered the blade, which was as smooth and fine and valiant a blade as any king could have decently hoped for. It was a splendid look which came into the king's eyes when he died, and I think that he was grateful. You do not know what a dreadful burden a king must bear. But you will—you will! For three days now you have been king. Everyone knew it but you! But we did not dare to tell you. Mu-senyui pitied you. He came to me tonight with tears in his eyes. 'He must be told,' he said. He didn't have the heart to tell you himself, so he sent me."

Mpatanasi was silent, for he was an old man and slow-witted. And he did not at first comprehend the monstrous villainy of Mu-senyui.

When Mpatanasi understood, he went out into the clearing, and pounded with his bare fists upon his chest and arms. Then he sat down upon the ground, and tittered idiotically.

His daughter came lazily through the door and comforted him with sneers. She stood above him, poised on her beautiful toes, and wrapped herself nonchalantly in shadows. Then she darted away between the boles of trees that seemed to mock and leer and writhe upward with volatile contortions. The trunks appeared to trucidate each other, and dark, amorphous branches descended from above and swayed in the moonlight, and gradually assumed the appearance of arms and legs, the arms and legs of amazingly ancient men, and each arm and each leg seemed to terminate in a bulbous knot, and long streamers of reddish moss depended from them and flaffed in the wind. The spaces between the trees were tapestried with shadowy thickets, and at the base of the trees bluish fungi bloated in the moonlight and filled the air with a noisome stench. Here and there an orchid extended its lurid red lips and

offered up a hideous libation to the spirit of the ancient forest. As Mpatanasi crouched in misery and sobbed and gibbered, a million million burning eyes watched him from behind gloomy thickets and envied him the protection of the moonlight and the quiet desolation of the clearing.

MPATANASI was a poet and easily impressed, albeit he pretended to despise poetry, and the sentiency of the forest filled him with an irrational fear. He had known moments of skepticism, when he had doubted the existence of the forest-devil, but now—he could no longer doubt. And then he thought of the treachery of his daughter and the diabolic machinations of Mu-senyui, and his torment and anguish grew into a fever, which flushed his face and darkened his eyes, and dried up his tongue.

But he was conscious that he had pronounced a doom—a miserable and disgraceful and maddening doom; and the forest-devil would expect, would require a victim. And he had pronounced the doom against the king, and he himself was king. He repeated it over and over again to himself, "I am king! I am king! I am king!" and the words seemed to echo and re-echo through every chamber of his brain, and he fancied that his blood took up the weird refrain and shouted it out through the tips of his fingers to the maimed and grotesque and revolting spirit-shapes that hovered mincingly about him and required and demanded the fulfilment of a doom.

"But I don't really believe in the forest-devil!" He spoke aloud and his voice sounded weak and strange and far away.

He went back to the hut and looked at his daughter sadly out of tired, bloodshot eyes. Then he made up a little bundle, and selected a tall, hard staff. He walked over and patted his daughter upon the head.

"I must go away," he said. "Perhaps if I travel fast I can escape the doom. It has been done, you know, and the forest-devil isn't really my enemy, and I'm not sure that he exists. But it is safer to travel."

His daughter bit her lips and glared. Then she kissed him upon the cheek, and took his head between her hands and smiled into his tired eyes.

"I do not blame you at all for wishing to save your head!" she said.

But when Mpatanasi had turned his back upon her, and had gone out through the narrow way into the weird, early dawn, she stamped violently upon the floor and tore out her hair in handfuls

ALL next day Mpatanasi traveled. At night with nervous limbs and dim eyes he sat down under a huge, reddish palm. The darkness closed in upon him, and he could feel it passing over his head and streaming past his ears. He felt that the darkness was solid, substantial, and that he could reach out and seize great handfuls of it. He breathed with difficulty, and he fancied that the palm above his head was breathing in unison with him. Once he imagined that the plant had laughed.

He got together a few sticks and made an insignificant fire. He sat with bowed head in the wretched light, moving his fingers over the fire to warm them, and casting frightened glances into the dark forest recesses before him, and at the swaying palm above his head. He toppled on his side, and lay with one arm extended, the fingers of his right hand touching the glowing embers.

He awoke with a shriek, and sat up. The forest was moving. Everything was moving, the trees, the mosses beneath him, the gigantic spreading lianas, the interlacing creepers—moving to a dreadful, an unsuspecting rhythm. A drumming and a droning, remote, uncanny, titanic, struck upon his ears and unfathomable abysses seemed to open out before him.

He had a momentary sensation of falling through unreverberate space, and then he was lifted up, and left with legs dangling in mid-air. He was lifted up between the trees, which closed in upon him, and then retreated, and at one moment he expected to be crushed to death and at the next he found himself alone in the center of a great pit, made by the regrouping of the trees, yards and yards from him.

Then the trees and vegetation about him began to glow with a fierce and shocking red light. The trees seemed afire, and red light streamed in rivers from their branches. He found himself suspended in a flaming forest, and at his feet little forest streamlets ran with a soft, welcome murmur. He kicked out with his arms and legs, and then he began to feel the heat, and to suffer from the ascending spirals of smoke, and he longed for the soft touch of his daughter, and her cool, comforting words.

Then he saw *it!*

TERRIBLY through the forest aisle it came, its huge batlike head thrust forward, and its small eyes glittering with unspeakable malice. Straight toward Mpatanasi it came, and its great, loathsome body swayed in the night wind and its fur turned crimson in the glare of the burning trees.

It was a caricature of evil such as Aubrey Beardsley could not have conceived. It would have been beyond the imagination of Rops, or of John Martin, or of Goya. It was a flaming, flying sadism, with tooth and talon to tear and to rend, and a hatred and blasphemy in its eyes such as none could look upon with cool vision and sane sense. It was Satan seen through the eyes of Baudelaire, or one of those terrible creatures described by Sir John Mandeville, which inhabit unexplored regions of Asia beyond the River Ganges.

For a moment it circled high up, above Mpatanasi's head, and then it began to flutter about him, reaching out with its hideous black beak. The top of its head was manlike, but black and hairless, and its small eyes were sunken, and it had the nose of a bat. A thin, chirping sound came from between its swollen lips. From the center of its furry breast two long appendages hung down, and they ended in black, lobster-shaped claws, which dragged ruthlessly across the forest floor.

To the unsophisticated eyes of Mpatanasi it represented the accumulated evil of generations upon generations of human beings who had lived and died and made no absolution. It was the malice of the ancient forest united to the sins of multitudes, and he knew intuitively that he had offended it, and called it forth, and that it demanded a victim.

When Mpatanasi fully apprehended his infinite peril he deliberately assumed an attitude of nervous defiance. He threw back his head, and stared into the grim, malevolent eyes of the thing his wilfulness had called forth.

For a moment the creature hesitated, and the flames from above and below enveloped it, and passed over it and through it. It opened its mouth, and emitted a thin stream of noisome yellow gas. Then it spat—deliberately spat at him. He could smell its acrid breath, and a mephitic odor of corruption, an offensive, filthy and indescribable smell assailed him and made him choke and cough.

The horrid nausea passed, and Mpatanasi felt a momentary exaltation. The creature had infused a queer assurance into him by its proximity. It was wrapped now in a ball of red and blue flame, and it chirped loudly as it backed away. It commenced circling about again. The trees were closing up, shutting it off. It descended suddenly to within three

(Continued on page 479)

Author of "Hunger," "The Wind That Tramps the World," etc.

AT DROMORE many strange legends were told about "The Castle". It was a magnificent building and perched on the extreme edge of Black Hill, like a great white albatross poised for flight. It had been built by a young oil magnate who had years before gone to California almost penniless, to return later with uncountable wealth. Blindly he had purchased a tract of barren land for a few hundred dollars, and this subsequently developed into a spectacular oil field.

After he had sold out his interests for a fabulous amount, he returned to the town of his boyhood, Dromore, a veritable conquering hero. He proposed to the most beautiful girl in the town and was instantly accepted. At once he commenced building the castle for her on Black Hill, a place dreaded by superstitious folk. It was haunted, they said, by strange wraiths as transparent as mist, and occasionally one heard eery sounds as of distant thunder. They pleaded with Dan Cooley not to build a home there, but he only derided their fears.

"The wraiths," he said, "exist only in people's distorted imaginations. They are just stray wisps of fog and mist such as float about any mountain peak. The weird booming is a purely natural phenomenon. Such noises, phantom noises if you like, occur in all parts of the world. Only recently the newspapers gave columns to a discussion of the cause, and scientists all agree that the sounds come up from the depths of the earth, the result of subterranean disturbances. I am not superstitious. We will prove that Black Hill, despite its sinister reputation, is the happiest, most joyous spot in the countryside."

So Dan Cooley continued his building, oblivious to all the comments and forebodings of the people, and at last the work was done. At the gayest party ever held in Dromore, a party to which all the poor folk of the countryside were invited, he was married. At the moment it seemed as if all the weird legends were groundless. There was nothing wraithlike in this.

And yet less than one month later Mrs. Cooley went violently insane. She rushed up to the turret of "The Castle" and, laughing wildly and hysterically, pitched headlong down to the ragged, grim black rocks hundreds of feet below. When Dan Cooley made his way down to the rocks where the poor broken body lay, he was horrified by the sight. Her clothes were

torn to shreds and her face was so scratched and disfigured that it suggested that she had been mauled by wild beasts.

Hours later a farmer found him babbling foolishly over the lifeless body. With the aid of the servants, the farmer carried the nerve-shattered husband to his bed. For weeks he raved in delirium. His fever was so intense that it seemed to consume his body. Finally the last spark of life burned out. They buried him beside the body of his wife beneath a great pine tree in the shadow of Black Hill, and the grim old "Castle" was locked up, left to the wraiths that haunt the mountain tops.

Then the country people shunned the path leading to it more than ever. Occasionally the most venturesome of the farm lads would creep up the crooked winding path, only to return breathlessly, asserting that there were eery lights burning in the windows.

Not for a moment did anyone dispute the statement by suggesting that the lights may have been caused by the reflecting rays of the orange-red rising moon.

For five years "The Castle" remained untenanted, for who would be so foolhardy as to move into a house with such an unsavory reputation? The people of Dromore, even the poorest of them, would not have accepted it as a gift if they had been forced to live in it.

"It will fall to ruins," they said, "for lack of care, and it will be a good thing for Dromore when it is gone."

THEN abruptly the unexpected happened. It was rented. Sportsly, the realtor, who was also the sheriff, the postmaster and the best informed citizen of Dromore, was so stunned by the fact that he almost suffered a stroke. He could scarcely wait to distribute the mail before broadcasting the news. He was a veritable newspaper of gossip and circulated throughout the countryside for miles around. That morning he neglected to read any of the post cards and he mixed up the mail for the first time in forty years. But nobody protested about his glaring errors, for his news quite submerged all other considerations.

Unfortunately he could not tell who had purchased "The Castle" because all negotiations had been conducted through an agent. At first he had not taken the matter seriously. He was constantly interviewed about the property, for the most part by curiosity seekers who simply wished to hear the details of the story, which it can be assumed Sportsly was never reluctant to tell. But now at last the house had been sold to a Mr. Cass Ledyard. Whether he was young or old, married or a bachelor, Sportsly did not know.

Within a very few weeks carpenters and mechanics were putting "The Castle" in order. It had been untenanted for so long that it was badly in need of repair.

When the workmen had departed, Cass Ledyard moved in. His daughter Nona accompanied him.

Cass Ledyard in time grew to be almost as great a mystery in Dromore as the Black Hill itself. Who he was, nobody knew. Nor did they have the faintest inkling whence he had come. He had covered his tracks as absolutely as if he had been a renowned criminal with a price upon his head. At Dromore he made friends with no one. Not a soul was ever invited to the house. For the most part in the evenings it remained in darkness. It still seemed as austere and cheerless as when it was vacant. Once a week York Sills, who kept the general store, delivered to the house enough meat and provisions to last throughout the ensuing seven days. He always placed the bundles upon the porch. He was never asked to

enter the house, for which he was thankful, and he was always paid at once in cash by Nona. At first he had entertained the suspicion that Cass Ledyard was a forger and hence his almost hermitlike existence, until Mr. Roberts of the bank in Middletown had assured him that the money was as good as any the treasury had ever turned out. So a splendid theoretical bubble was burst.

In appearance, Cass Ledyard was rather odd. His great, glittering, deep-sunken eyes, shaded by huge bushy eyebrows, gave to his white, gaunt, somber face a rather fanatical appearance. He was very tall and slightly round-shouldered. He carried himself in a furtive, hang-dog fashion, as if he were always expecting a blow. When he looked up at one, only his eyes moved. Unless absolutely forced to, he seldom turned his head. His mouth was covered by a thick, bushy, uncared-for beard and his hair was so long it reached almost to his shoulders. Add to this the fact that his head was rather huge, and it can be imagined that he presented a rather grotesque appearance. He always dressed in black, which accentuated the sallow color of his face and the wildness of his habitual expression.

"The only difference between Mrs. Cooley and Cass Ledyard," declared York Sills, "is that she went crazy after living in 'The Castle' and Ledyard was crazy before he moved in."

"A man would have to be insane," asserted Sportsly, "to even think of living on Black Hill."

"It must be terrible for his daughter," added York Sills.

Nona Ledyard was beautiful in the fullest sense of the word; a dark, languid beauty that made one think of the paintings of old Italian masters. There must have been a trace of Latin blood in her, for all the beauty of southern Europe seemed reflected in her sad, rather wistful expression. Her eyes were dark and expressive and were veiled by lashes of wondrous length. Her hair was as black as old ebony and cast off the same soft glittering glow. Her warm red lips served to emphasize the ivory whiteness of her face. She was magnificent. Yet as one gazed into her face one was far more impressed by her tragic, mournful expression than by the beauty and grace of her features.

The people of Dromore pitied her, a girl who should have had every luxury as a setting for her jewel-like loveliness and yet was forced to remain in a weird and shadowy house all alone except for the presence of a grim old man whose very sanity was open to question.

Night after night she used to sit alone in her dark room gazing out on the somber black countryside, a prey to fears and worries too frightful to describe. She lived in abject fear. She was mortally afraid, not *of* her father, but *for* her father. The fear that gnawed like a hungry rat at his mind was beginning to grip hers, until life itself became a veritable torture.

Every night, at the darkest hour, her father rushed from the house like a wild animal, his long hair streaming in the breeze as he fled. And always it seemed to Nona as if he were trying to escape from himself. It is frightful when one endeavors to escape from something that is buried in his body as firmly as his very heart. Always when he returned it was nearly dawn, and the wan look of his face was appalling. He was breathless and more colorless than ordinarily, and his dank face was bathed in perspiration. And all through the hours when he was absent, Nona would sit at the window, as cold as ice, as if carved of stone. Every screech of the wind, every crackle of the tree branches, every hoot of an owl threw her into a veritable panic.

At last she could stand it no longer. Her taut nerves had reached the breaking point. She approached her father, not directly telling him of her fears and terrors, but in a rather guarded way. She declared they needed a servant—the work was more than she could handle alone. Her father acquiesced at once. He hardly seemed conscious of what she was saying.

So immediately she commenced advertising in a newspaper that was published in a town about ten miles away, but though she received many answers, no one was willing to take a job in a house on Black Hill. They shunned it as if it had been plague-infested. At last an ex-convict answered the advertisement, a man who had just completed a ten-year prison term and who looked almost as uncouth as a gorilla. His name was Sig. But whether it was his first name or his last he refused to say.

"When I went to prison," he said, "I lost my personality. The man I was is dead. There are no threads of existence for me to take up again. The few living relatives I had went back on me. There isn't a soul in the world willing to give me a chance."

His words sounded so hopeless, Nona felt sorry for him at once, despite his uncouthness.

"If you wish," said she, "you can come and work for us; that is, if you are not afraid of Black Hill."

He laughed savagely.

"I am afraid of nothing," said he emphatically, "death least of all. If I were afraid of anything it would be of life. For ten years I lived in prison, never visited by a soul, haunted by all sorts of wild thoughts and desires for revenge. I was going to 'get' the man that got me."

He smiled mirthlessly.

"Anger is a peculiar thing," he said. "It burns itself out by its very intensity. When I was finally released, my hatred had vanished, leaving me cold. Only hopelessness remained."

Nona could not help thinking how akin was her own case to that of Sig. She felt that like him, she, too, had been shut up in prison until only hopelessness remained.

And yet less than one week later, her viewpoint slightly changed. Much of the somberness vanished, for she met Stark Laurier by the simplest accident. Cass Ledyard had been out walking in the woods and had tripped over a hidden tree-stump, spraining his ankle rather badly. For a while he was unable to walk. He lay on the ground groaning in pain, when Stark Laurier found him. At first he was rather surly despite his agony and was unwilling to accept help, but finally, realizing that he was forced to, his attitude changed. In fact, after Stark Laurier had helped him home—almost carried him in fact—he grew positively cordial and urged Stark to remain with them a while.

"We seldom, in fact never, have company," he said, "and your presence with us would undoubtedly help to break the monotony of the mountain silence."

Stark Laurier agreed with him absolutely after he had met Nona, for he realized that wherever she was no place could be monotonous for him. So that very afternoon he moved his things over to "The Castle." And again the country people shook their heads and declared that no good could come of it.

2

Stark Laurier was a novelist, but fortunately he had inherited a moderate fortune from his father, which permitted him to follow his own inclinations regarding the type of stories he wrote. He specialized in unusual fiction, and therefore "The Castle" was an absolute magnet to him. He was quite young, well under thirty and a keen lover of excitement

and adventure. Romance, too, held its allure for him, and romance was typified in the person of Nona Ledyard.

During the ensuing days he wandered much in the woods with her. She told him all the superstitions pertaining to Black Hill, of the phantom noises, the mistlike wraiths that haunted the mountain fastnesses, and of the girl who had gone insane on her honeymoon in "The Castle".

"It is all very interesting," commented Stark Laurier, "but fiction purely. The phantom noises are undoubtedly merely a natural phenomenon. The girl who went insane would probably have done so whether she dwelt in 'The Castle' or not. Perhaps insanity runs in her family. Did anyone ever take the trouble to trace her antecedents?"

"Perhaps you are right," said Nona reluctantly, "but even *I* seem to feel as if there is something sinister about Black Hill. At night when I gaze off into the shadows of the forest it is not hard for me to imagine that all sorts of weird, fantastic monstrosities are lurking in among those velvet shrouds of blackness. Every night, or almost every night, my father rushes off as if all the terrors of earth are following right at his heels. I wish more than anything else in the world that I had seen the last of Black Hill forever."

Although Stark Laurier did not admit it to Nona, he, too, felt as if some terrible weight were crushing down on his shoulders, some impending disaster too frightful to dwell upon. Perhaps the gloom of "The Castle" added to his general depression, for it was seldom lighted cheerfully. Cass Ledyard would not permit more than one room to be lighted at a time, and as the lights were rather dull in any case because the shades were made of antique colored glass, the gloom of the halls and the other rooms seemed intensified by the single light. Stark Laurier would have preferred that the entire house remain dark rather than have this travesty of brilliance. Once when he disregarded instructions and turned on the light in the hall he encountered such a look of diabolical hatred in the glaring eyes of Cass Ledyard that he never repeated the indiscretion.

For the most part Cass Ledyard kept to his own room, but occasionally he joined Stark Laurier before the open hearth in the library. At such times he was the most agreeable of companions and a most interesting conversationist. He seemed familiar with every quarter of the globe and could talk intelligently on almost any subject. He was particularly interested in the lore of precious stones and in the science of color. Once he told a peculiar story about an old soothsayer of the East who was well versed in all the arts, black, white and gray. He knew the science of color more definitely than any other man that ever lived. And he had a theory with which he wished to experiment. One day he enticed his enemy to his dwelling, which was fitted out with enough paraphernalia to shock a ghost. He placed his enemy in a certain spot, then turned on two rays of light of his own invention, which clashed so violently that his enemy, who sat in the exact spot where the color forces met, was shattered to atoms. Not even a vestige of him remained. Of course it was purely a bit of Persian fantasy, but to Stark Laurier it was interesting nevertheless.

Then he told all sorts of odd little stories about the power of precious stones—how the opal has grown to be an omen of ill-luck — how melted pearls in vinegar can cure illness, how the amethyst is the most soothing of gems because it blends best with the sun.

Thus would he keep on telling almost endless anecdotes. At such

times all the mystery of his wild appearance seemed to slip from him and he seemed as rational and calm as anyone else. And yet in the late evenings he would continue his wild dashes into the forest like a frightened, hunted thing.

CASS LEDYARD permitted Stark Laurier to wander wherever he wished over the house, with the exception of one room. This room opened off the library and was always kept locked.

"If you enter that room without my permission," he said gravely, "I shall not be responsible for what happens thereafter."

This peculiar warning only served to make Stark Laurier's curiosity more acute. He wondered if there were some living thing in that room, some living horror too awful to gaze upon, but he soon abandoned this theory because Cass Ledyard never entered the room. If there were any living thing there it would be necessary to feed it. As the days dragged on his curiosity grew.

Sig, also, seemed rather mysterious in his actions. He crept about the house, utterly soundless. Occasionally Stark Laurier would look up from his book with a start to find Sig standing over him, his grotesque, gorillalike face looking more formidable than ever. Although Sig was always polite and servile, Stark Laurier realized that in his manner there was a hidden note of hatred. He resented Stark's presence there.

It was not always gloomy, however, for as time wore on, Nona's fascination increased. Her loveliness wove a spell about him, a net from which he did not wish to escape. At last he told her how much she meant to him, and to his surprize and joy she confessed that she cared equally as much for him. So they became engaged.

Cass Ledyard made no objection to their marriage, although he became immediately quiet and grave and went to his room right after supper. That night Sig disappeared without a word of explanation. His life was shattered as completely as that of the Persian in Cass Ledyard's story, who had unfortunately sat in the direct path of the clashing colors. Although no one even suspected it, Sig had begun to think of Nona as his own. He imagined that she too, like him, was a social outcast. He believed eventually she would consent to become his wife. He did not realize the absurdity of the thought, nor did he realize that he was a loathsome monstrosity. It is fortunate that we see only the most pleasing aspect of our faces when we gaze into mirrors. Sig had studied Cass Ledyard every moment they had been together and he had arrived at the conclusion that Cass Ledyard was a far more notorious criminal than even he himself. The thought increased his own egotism. He was less in fear of the law than his employer, who evidently lived in constant dread of it.

3

THE next night Cass Ledyard was just as cordial as usual to Stark Laurier. He had not appeared at breakfast or lunch. He had remained in his room, and Nona, knowing her father's eccentricities, did not disturb him. But at supper he was quite talkative. He recounted many interesting anecdotes and proved himself in truth a charming host. After supper he and Stark Laurier went into the library and seated themselves before the hearth while Nona went to the kitchen to wash the dishes, for now that Sig had disappeared they were entirely without servants.

Most of Cass Ledyard's talk that evening was about the Orient, odd little tales whose settings were in the fabulous romance countries of the East. He talked of India and southern China so vividly that the cities

he told of seemed to materialize before their eyes among the crackling embers of the open fire. And then eventually conversation veered around to Tibet—that wild, desolate little country situated at the roof of the world.

"It is a land of drifting shadows," he said, "a land in the grip of a fanatical religion, ruled by a revered Lama of whom the people stand in as great awe as if he were the White God himself. In Tibet one hears many strange incidents. For example, a prognosticator once foretold a happening which irritated the Dalai Lama. In a fit of rage he summoned the man before him and ordered that his lips be sewn together by a tentmaker, proclaiming that if what the soothsayer predicted came to pass he was to be signally honored; if not, the stitches were to remain as a fitting reminder that it is unwise even for a prophet to talk too much."

As Cass Ledyard finished speaking, some unseen hand switched off the electric lights, plunging the room into a well of darkness. The fire on the hearth had burned low. Only an eery blue flame remained, which cast off no illumination. It seemed, on the contrary, to make the blackness of the room more impenetrable. There came a sudden draft, as cold and damp and dismal as if a window had been stealthily opened and the night fog was drifting in. From the distant mountain solitudes floated a dismal wail as if some animal were in distress. The treetops outside the window swayed and swished, and seemed to be murmuring plaintively to one another about the haunted horror that had broken loose once more in the mountains. Stark Laurier sat rigid in his chair, every nerve tense, listening, trying to peer through the curtains of blackness.

He felt as if some other presence were in the room besides himself and his host. Once some unseen shape passed soundlessly between him and the blue flame of the fire, hiding it for a brief moment. Cass Ledyard groaned; he was breathing heavily as if the very act of living had become a pain to him.

Then like a flash, Stark Laurier thought of Nona. She was in the kitchen, alone, unprotected, left to the mercy of the intruder.

Not hesitating for a moment, Stark Laurier sprang to his feet. He rushed blindly toward the kitchen door, but he never reached it. For he tripped over a great chair and fell with such a crash that it echoed uncannily throughout the house. The next moment he felt two bony hands creeping toward his throat, feeling their way up his coat. They were cold and damp, as the hands of a forest prowler naturally would be. Stark Laurier recoiled in horror. Then he pulled himself together and the struggle began in earnest. Each endeavored to grip the other's throat. Their sole desire was to kill.

Stark Laurier realized that at last he was face to face with the specter that haunted the mountain. It was not a wraith made of cloudlike mist, but a strong man of flesh and blood, though no less of a menace because of that fact. He wondered what had become of Nona. If he lost the fight, he shuddered to think of her possible fate. The very thought doubled his strength. With one mighty effort he broke free of the steel-like talons of fingers. The next moment his hands had closed about a scrawny though muscular throat. He emitted a little chuckle of satisfaction as he commenced to close his fingers together. Even as he did so the lights flared up again. Nona Ledyard stood in the doorway. Her face was very white and she was breathing heavily. Stark Laurier looked down at his victim and recoiled in horror. It was Cass Ledyard. In the darkness they had been fighting each other.

Cass Ledyard struggled to his feet. He was just barely able to breathe but he did not seem to bear any resentment toward Stark Laurier. For the mistake in the blackness they were equally to blame. But his usually pale face was a sickly green, as if he were a plague-sufferer, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets.

"What is the matter?" gasped Nona.

As she spoke, Cass Ledyard rushed across the room in a panic. The door of the adjoining room, the room which he had forbidden Stark Laurier to enter, was open. When Stark Laurier and Nona followed Cass Ledyard, they beheld him standing before an empty mantelpiece.

"It's gone!" he shrieked. "It's gone!"

He clutched paralytically at the air.

"The Golden Buddha is stolen!"

"Perhaps," hazarded Stark Laurier, "you will recover it in time."

Cass Ledyard's face as he turned upon him was horrible to behold. His mouth worked convulsively and he was drooling at the lips. There was no accounting for the hatred and fury of his expression.

"Fool!" he rasped. "Fool!"

Then he burst into delirious laughter.

"I have lived ten years for this moment," he raged, "and now you speak of recovery."

He seized a huge cane.

"Get out of my house!" he screamed, as he brandished the heavy knotted stick above Stark Laurier's head. "Get out of my house, you fool!"

Stark was speechless with astonishment at the turn which events had taken. Nona took his arm.

"Father is not himself," she pleaded; "please go."

As if in a dream, Stark Laurier permitted himself to be led unresisting to the door. Nona pressed her cold lips to his. The next moment she was gone and the door of "The Castle" had been barricaded against him.

The night was intensely dark. Against the reflected sheen of the blood-burning moon the trees stood out in jagged silhouette. The forest trails were very damp. Stray bits of mist, illuminated, white-glowing, moved stealthily about as if they were lost spirits searching for bodies to enter. The distant, feeble dripping of a mountain stream floated to his ears so monotonously that eventually it seemed to grow to drum-pitch. The thickets seemed filled with subdued voices, as if all the woodfolk were deep in conversation. Stark leaned against a tree. He shivered. The intense cold of the night air was as cutting as a meat-cleaver. It dug to his very bones. The fact that he was hatless served to increase his general discomfort. His head was in a whirl. He could not find his way down the perilous mountain paths in the darkness. But even if he had been able, he could not leave Nona to the mercy of all the unexplainable mysteries of Black Hill. At any moment she might call to him for help. So he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree not twenty feet from "The Castle". Now all the lights were out and it looked as grim and ghostlike as a tomb.

The ensuing hours seemed endless. The coldness increased. The night dew fell from the leaves above his head like chips of ice. Once something crawled across his foot. He imagined it was only a hallucination. But when he put his hand down and felt his shoe it was slimy. Never once did he close his eyes. In his misery sleep was impossible, nor did he wish to sleep. He waited intently, his ears strained for the slightest cry, but none came. The silence was unbroken, if a

forest can be called silent that seems to contain a thousand whispering voices.

Dawn came at last. To Stark Laurier it seemed considerably delayed. He rose to his feet, surprized that he was not frozen stiff. His body contained less warmth than a snowman. For half an hour he walked briskly up and down to get his sluggish blood back into circulation.

The sun climbed gradually higher and higher. The roving bits of fog vanished. The warm rays sucked up the night dew. Even his spirits emerged from their depression as the charm of the morning grew. Suddenly as he passed the main entrance of "The Castle", he was surprized to see Nona Ledyard standing pensively in the doorway.

"All night I have worried," she said. "I was miserable. I pictured you killed, lying broken on the rocks of some ravine. I knew it would have been impossible to get safely away in the blackness."

"I could not have gone in any case," he said. "The thought of you held me here more completely than even the darkness."

She smiled wistfully.

"Then you are not angry with me?" she said.

"I could not be angry with you," he answered; "only if it is all the same to you, the next time you intend to drive me out of doors, choose a warmer night."

He was in excellent spirits now that his worry over Nona was lifted from his shoulders.

"However," he continued lightly, "I suppose I should be thankful that we didn't have a blizzard."

"Father is full of remorse this morning," she told him, "so you must have breakfast with him and give him an opportunity to explain his peculiar actions of last night."

Stark Laurier needed no second bidding. Curiosity had ever been his weak point; besides, he was ravenously hungry. His appetite was a very good friend. It never deserted him. So he entered the house.

He found Cass Ledyard already seated at the table in the dining room. As Stark Laurier approached, he rose and held out his hand.

"My shame is boundless," he said, and it was hard to realize that this calm-faced man was the maniac of the night before, "and yet it is not sufficient to make me unhappy, for I have been a virtual prisoner for ten years, a prisoner of fear, but now I am free at last. I have lived through an inferno worse than Dante ever pictured."

He walked over and opened the window.

"It is a beautiful morning," he said. "I do not know when the countryside has seemed so perfect. Those mountains to the east I like to think of as 'The Mountains of the Morning'. Beyond their purple ridges the sun goes into camp at night."

Then he returned and seated himself at the table.

"I owe you an explanation," he said. "If you will let me tell you the story of the Golden Buddha I am sure many of my fanatical actions of the last few weeks will be clarified."

He did not wait for Stark Laurier to assent, but plunged at once into his story.

"To tell about the Golden Buddha," he began thoughtfully, "I will have to carry you in revery away off to the interior of unexplored Tibet, where the Dalai Lama rules as absolute and merciless as any tribal chief in darkest Africa. Whatever drew my footsteps to the bleak and bare wilderness of Tibet in the first place I cannot explain. Perhaps it was the lure of forbidden lands, the desire to walk through cities to which no other Christian had ever penetrated, to gaze upon mountain ranges,

ravines and glacial lakes piled with ice upon which the subdued glare of the sun painted prismatic colors, to fight a way through wind-beaten, storm-swept mountain passes, enduring a cold so intense that every breath of wind shrieking down from the needle-pointed peaks crashed against the face like a solid thing, and to know as each new scene loomed up that no other Christian had ever penetrated those inhospitable, bleak and desolate regions."

In Cass Ledyard's eyes there was a far-away, dreamy expression as if in retrospection he was again seeing the mysterious visions that haunt the mountain passes.

"I first heard of the little Golden Buddha at Simla in India," he continued presently, "immediately on my return from Nepal. Colonel Gerould, of the British army, told me its story one evening as we sat out on the balcony of the London Club. All about us people were laughing and chatting merrily. From far in the distance came strains of delightful music, blending pleasantly with the exquisite fragrance of a million flowers.

"'If you are looking for adventure,' drawled Colonel Gerould, 'why don't you journey to Lassa in quest of the myth-famed Golden Buddha, which is more revered by the people than is the Dalai Lama? The tiny statue is kept in a sacred temple that has stood for a thousand years. It is guarded by two old men, which is considered sufficient, for who would even attempt to steal so sacred a relic? And yet the Golden Buddha is not really the property of the Tibetans, for many years ago it was stolen from a temple somewhere in inland China. So you see by procuring the Buddha you would not be robbing the Tibetans, for surely one cannot lose title to a thing which one has never really owned.'

"Thus for an hour Colonel Gerould talked and extolled the merits of the Golden Buddha, until at last he kindled a fire of longing in my heart to journey to Lassa on a quest almost as obscure as Ponce de Leon's search for the Fountain of Youth. In less than two hours we were discussing the details of my journey. I fully appreciated the dangers which would be encountered on the road to Lassa, for the almost unknown city of mystery is one of the great centers of the religious world.

"The days that followed were as busy as any I have ever known. I went about purchasing and collecting such paraphernalia as I deemed necessary for the expedition. In this task, which was by no means small, I was ably assisted by Ben Ali Reyham, an Arab guide who had a dozen times proved his extraordinary worth to me, and Noor el Arfi, Ben Ali's greatest friend. Thus the final snags were unraveled, and at last the eventful day came which marked the start of our expedition. . . .

"Of the first few days of travel nothing need be said. They contained little of interest. It was not until we got well away from the grass-covered hill country that the real trouble of our march began. Up forest-clad mountains we pushed our way, skirting moraines, through a region of perpetual snow and then down into a fertile valley once again. But the valley was only a flitting part of our journey, for soon we climbed a precipitous slope and entered the great corrugated uplands of Tibet, cut by bleak mountain ranges of tremendous height. Now we were in a weirdly wild and desolate country with nothing to break the frightful monotony but bleak walls of bare, gray rock, vast glaciers and high ranges crowned with eternal snow. Added to this, we were passing through a section peopled by tribes of fierce, warlike hills-

men who hold the right of way to Lassa, and our position can be imagined."

Again Cass Ledyard lapsed into silence. Stark Laurier made no effort to interrupt his revery.

"I fear I am beginning to ramble," he continued slowly.

"Eventually we arrived within two miles of the sacred city of Lassa. We were fortunate in finding a cave in the mountains, wherein we could lie hidden. If our presence had been discovered we should undoubtedly have been made captives to be dealt with according to the passing mood of the Dalai Lama. . . .

"When night came on, I stole forth alone from our hiding place. As I look back, I shiver even now as I think of that night's adventures. Something in the uncanny, grim coldness of the forbidden country seemed to chill my blood to ice. My teeth chattered and my knees trembled so that it was a wonder I was able to reach the temple at all. I frankly dreaded to go forward and nothing on earth could have made me turn back. I feared cowardice more than I feared danger, just as some men would rather face death than ridicule.

"At the open door of the temple I paused and peered nervously within. A faint light burned near the altar upon which stood the Golden Buddha. To this day I could not describe the furnishings of that temple if you were to offer me all the treasure of the Incas. My eyes were glued upon that little Golden Buddha. I gloated over it as avariciously as any miser might gloat over money. I think, now, that at that moment I was temporarily delirious as a result of the terrible hardships we had encountered on the road to Lassa. But at the moment I did not wonder at my intense cupidity. To long to possess that statue of Buddha seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"I STOLE into the temple unchallenged. I might have been walking through a dead city for all the opposition I encountered. Five minutes later I had the idol in my possession and was fleeing back to the mountain solitudes. And now fear conquered. I sped down that mountain pass as if pursued by a thousand warlike hillsmen. Every shrieking wail of the wind among the jagged rocks seemed to me like the war cry of my pursuers. And yet I sped down that dark and silent ravine absolutely alone. Not a single Tibetan followed me.

"In some unknown way I reached the cave and fell exhausted at the feet of my two guides, Ben Ali Reyham and his comrade. That night I lay and tossed on my blanket in the wildest delirium. When morning came I was in the grip of a raging fever. So it was impossible for us to return to Simla. I could not walk a single step.

"During the next two weeks my brain recorded little of the happenings about me. I just lay weak and only semi-conscious, at the point of death. Every day my companions expected the last spark of life to flicker out of my wasted body. Yet somehow I pulled through.

"At the beginning of the third week the fever lifted and I regained full consciousness. I was still very weak, but there was no longer any doubt of my recovery.

"Then it was that Ben Ali Reyham approached the blanket on which I lay. 'Master,' he said, 'the ways of Allah are marvelous. He has drawn suspicion away from us and placed it upon the heads of the two old men who used to guard the temple of the Golden Buddha. The Dalai Lama has decreed that they must die to atone for the theft. If, within the next ten sunrises, the Golden Buddha is not returned, they are to be tied together, hand and foot, and cast into the river.

So you see, my master, a great danger has been lifted from our shoulders'.

"Weeks later we were back in Simla, or rather, I should say I arrived at an inferno, for I have never known a happy moment since the Buddha has been in my possession. Sometimes I seem to see the bloated, ghastly corpses of the old men floating on that ancient river in Tibet. And the thongs that bind them together have bound my happiness as well. I have been a slave to that idol more truly than any lama ever was. Always I have had the fear of retribution hanging over me. I have been a hunted thing, always watching for the grim, gaunt emissaries who must surely be relentlessly seeking me out.

"I used to live with Nona at Cresco, but we fled when some suspicious looking gipsies came and camped within half a mile of our house. I was afraid. Fear is a terrible thing. To be hunted like a wild thing is dreadful. But to be tormented by one's conscience is even worse.

"Sometimes at night I feel as if my mind is breaking. A sudden impulse overcomes me and I race out into the night over the crooked winding roads until I return absolutely exhausted and sleep from utter weariness.

"That Golden Buddha hypnotized me. I longed to get rid of it, yet I could not throw it away. My hands were tied. I have been under a spell. But now the spell has been lifted, for the lamas have gotten back their sacred idol after a relentless pursuit that lasted more than ten years."

4

Stark Laurier and Nona were married early the next week and they left at once for a quiet honeymoon in New York City.

"I haven't been in New York for years," said Nona, "and I could not take a trip anywhere I would enjoy more."

As the train sped down through the mountains, Stark Laurier said thoughtfully, "I have been thinking a great deal about the disappearance of the Golden Buddha and I have come to the conclusion that the Tibetans did not again secure possession of it as your father imagined."

"I thought," she drawled, "I had married a novelist, and now to my surprize I find I have married a detective. What is your theory?"

"I think," he told her, "in fact I am almost certain that Sig took the golden idol when he ran away. He was an ex-convict and undoubtedly realized that the little statue was of great value because it was made of pure gold."

"That is splendid," she asserted, "as far as it goes, but like most deductions it doesn't go far enough."

As she spoke she opened her black over-night bag and drew from it the Golden Buddha.

"You see," she went on wickedly, "you have married a scoundrel, because it was I who stole the Golden Buddha. It was I who turned off the electric lights and then opened the window to give the affair an uncanny appearance. For I realized that the Golden Buddha was wrecking my father's life, driving him mad. He was fleeing from pursuers that did not exist. I do not believe that a single soul is following him. I knew he wished to get rid of the statue but did not have the strength nor courage to destroy it himself. Now we must carefully dispose of it so he will never see it again."

Stark Laurier was amazed, but he was also delighted with her stratagem.

"A moment ago," he said, "you stated that you had married a detective as well as a novelist, but you were wrong. You married only a novelist."

THE THIRD THUMB-PRINT

by Mortimer Levitan

THE persistent ringing of the doorbell angered Professor Sanders; it brought to his lips words unscholarly and almost profane; it worried, disgusted, and sickened him. Still, he let the bell ring, ring, ring. . . . In his study, littered with papers of infinite variety and darkened by drawn blinds, he tramped to and fro. In a frenzied effort to defeat the clamoring bell, he held his hands tightly to his ears; but the odious sounds went around the hands, went through them, ignored them. The batteries were suffering, too; already the vehement clangor had degenerated into buzzes and tinkles. Soon, very soon, the benevolent laws of physics would disarm the batteries, and the bell would thenceforth be silent.

The ringing stopped. Professor Sanders fell into a chair, exhausted, desperately in need of calm reflection. The batteries, he meditated, would cost twenty-five cents apiece; two of them would cost fifty cents—quite a sum; an electrician would have to install them. The inconsiderate reporters should be compelled to pay for them. Three short feeble buzzes. . . . The professor arose automatically. He could not understand why his reflections had ended so abruptly. He fumbled around for a reason. Somehow or other, that weak convulsion of the bell reminded him of something—something he had promised, something he must do, some engagement he must fulfil. Unconsciously he strolled to the front door, opened it absent-mindedly, and admitted a dapper young man of twenty-two. Then he closed and locked the door.

"I'll appreciate this very much, Professor," said the visitor.

"There's something I ought to do," confided the professor, "but I can't think what it is. The cursed bell rang three times, and that reminded me of something, but I can't think what."

"You promised to let me in when I gave that signal."

"That's so!" The professor was ingenuously surprized. "I knew it was something. But you're in already! I opened the door without being aware of it. One of those barbaric reporters might have slipped in, and then—they're mischief-makers, they are; there ought to be a law against them."

The gray-haired, bespectacled, full-bearded man would have forgotten the presence of the other, would have declaimed long and bitterly, had not

Guy Steel interposed, in friendly though selfish fashion:

"You can't blame the reporters. You've made history by your great work. The people are interested; they want to know more about you, and the business of the reporter is to find out for them."

"I don't care to have my name and my work flung about in your yellow newspapers. I'm satisfied to have the scientific journals treat the matter; and besides, my manuscript has not yet been sent to the publishers."

THE professor led the way to the study. Not that Guy Steel had need for guidance, however, for he had been in the study many times during his undergraduate days. A sort of protégé of the queer old pedagogue who lived a solitary life in a cottage, Guy had established a close intimacy (it was not really friendship) which gave him frequent access to the study. He was a shy man, was Professor Sanders, and few people possessed his confidence or friendship.

"Why have you the curtains down?" inquired the younger man.

"So those pests of reporters will think no one is at home. But those reporters don't think; they merely bother. Let's see—you're not a reporter, are you?"

"I'm in business. You know, Professor, I've heard so much about your wonderful work that I thought I'd presume upon old friendship and come straight to headquarters to get the right dope. I explained in my note; don't you remember?"

"Too bad. You would have made a scientist."

"There must be business men as well as scientists. Besides, I shouldn't have the patience to work at a thing the way you do. How long did it take you to work out your system for the determination of criminals by thumb-prints?"

"Nineteen years—all the time I could spare from my teaching for nineteen years. I had to work for a living, my boy, or I'd have given my results to the world ten years ago."

"Nineteen years! So that's what you've been doing with your spare time! We used to think you were making a new translation of Homer, or something of that sort. And so you've been grinding away on the greatest book of the century without anyone knowing a thing about it!"

"Secrecy was essential. When a man begins work along channels that mark a radical departure from generally accepted notions, the scientific world laughs and scoffs. The derision of the public never touches a true scientist: it is the ridicule of fellow scientists that stings and discourages. Now you understand why I told no one—not even you—of my work."

"How did you ever get the idea in the first place?"

"Two men formed the foundation—Galton and Lombroso."

"Galton? Any relation to the eugenics man?"

"The same man. His really great work consisted in systematizing the old observation that no two persons have the same thumb-mark. Now, Lombroso, the great Italian anthropologist, showed the scientific world that external marks frequently determine criminality. The shape of a head will often show a murderer. But Lombroso didn't go far enough: he didn't produce a working system. All I did was to combine Galton and Lombroso. My work consisted in showing that the lines on the thumbs, which differ in each person, mean something, just as much as the shape of the skull. It took nineteen years, but I've succeeded. I've reduced Lombroso to a workable system on Galton lines. My system enables you to tell whether a man is a criminal merely by measuring and classifying his thumb-print. Moreover, you can determine what

particular course the criminality will take. There is an infinite distinction between the print of a robber and murderer; you can easily detect the difference between a man who would commit arson and one who would commit rape. You can tell the degree of cruelty to be used in the crime; whether the crime is to be committed with passion, cold blood, stealth, cunning."

Neither spoke for a time. Each watched the other through eyes accustomed to the dim light of the study. The professor, who had given his account with rare enthusiasm, waited for questions: he expected no one to listen to the simplest lecture without asking questions—a habit acquired in the classroom.

"Aren't the thumbs the same in a kid as when he grows up?"

"The designs on the thumbs never change."

"Then you can tell whether a newborn baby is going to be a murderer?"

"As surely as you can tell its sex."

"Gosh, I'm not going to let you see any of my thumb-prints."

The professor removed his spectacles and toyed with them before answering.

"You'll find some of our best friends are murderers. Some haven't killed anyone as yet, to be sure, but they will in time, just as surely as an object thrown into the air will fall to ground at a certain rate of speed. Psychological laws are as fixed as physical laws."

"But there must be a chance for exceptions or mistakes."

"None at all. A science that permits of exceptions or mistakes is no science."

The professor stopped to emphasize the statement.

"I have succeeded in formulating a new science. I've studied the thumb-prints of ten thousand criminals, and only one apparent exception did I find. He was an old man serving a life term for murder of the most brutal type; yet his thumb-print was that of an innocent man. I obtained all the records of his trial and found that the evidence against him was purely circumstantial. That man was innocent; and if it hadn't been for the dread of revealing my system prematurely, I would have taken the matter up with the governor. I might have freed the man, but it would have imperiled the system. My system is infallible."

Steel smiled as he said, "Of course, Professor Sanders, I believe every word you say, but it's rather hard to swallow. If you've really accomplished what you say, you've done the greatest work of the century. Why, it won't be possible for a guilty person to escape."

"They might cut their thumbs off, but the absence of thumbs would be considered conclusive evidence of guilt after my system has supplanted the antiquated notions of criminal procedure now in vogue."

STEEL arose, walked over to the desk, and nervously played with various articles scattered about, as he talked.

"Professor," he began from his newly assumed position, "would you make a test for me? Suppose I bring you five or six thumb-prints, will you tell me whether their owners are criminals or not?"

"You demand final proof? Well, I scarcely can object, even though it hurts my vanity. You bring me the prints, and I'll convince even you."

The doorbell rang, not clamorously as an hour ago, but persistently.

"There they go again," lamented Sanders.

"Why don't you disconnect the bell, if the ringing annoys you?"

"That is a good suggestion. How does one accomplish that result?"

"I'll do it for you," volunteered Steel, starting for the tiny kitchen

where the disconsolate bell was fastened to the wall.

"I'll show you where—"

Sanders stopped short and fumbled around his desk. He ran his hands through all his pockets and then searched blindly over the surface of the desk.

"I can't find them," he murmured to himself.

"What's the trouble?" asked Steel, when he returned from the kitchen.

"It's no use: I can't find them. I put them some place. . . ."

"Your glasses?"

"I know I had them a few seconds ago."

"Shall I pull up the blinds?"

"No, no! Those reporters would probably grin through the windows like a pack of wolves at a lamb. I can see them licking their reportorial chops now, ready to pounce upon me and tear me asunder."

"They won't see the light if I turn it on."

"Don't turn on the light! I can't see a foot away without my glasses, but I'd rather be blind than have those reporters get me."

"I'll look, but I can't see much here."

Steel searched the room—on the desk, under the desk, on chairs, under books—but the glasses remained unfound.

"Never mind," sighed Sanders. "If I don't find them myself, Mrs. Jones will find them in the morning. She always finds everything."

"As you say. Well, I'll have to be going now. I'll come back tomorrow with the prints. Thanks very much for this interview."

"The back door! For the sake of things scientific, take the back door!" shouted the professor, when he heard Steel advancing toward the front door.

Holding to the young man's arm, the professor shuffled into the kitchen, blindly felt for the key, opened the door and fairly shoved the visitor out of the house, such was his haste to regain the safety of locked doors. He feared lest some one of the enemy, more skilled and adventurous than the rest, might cross the threshold with a single foot and thus effect an entrance. Luckily no such calamity occurred. He groped his way back into the study and there renewed his search for the delinquent spectacles. It was a long search, exasperating, futile. Touch, with the questionable aid of extremely near-sighted eyes, revealed no clue. The bewildered professor paced aimlessly about the room until he was thrown prostrate upon the floor by a chair. He made no attempt to rise; but every now and then he would vaguely make the rounds of all his pockets. Wretched with despair, rendered helpless and useless by ineffective vision, he reconciled himself to the separation from his spectacles until morning, when Mrs. Jones, who put his house in order each day, would assuredly find them. Until then, however, he must suffer; he must refrain from work; he must simply think.

Eight o'clock the next morning there came three loud knocks on the door. Professor Sanders painfully picked himself up, stumbled toward the front door and opened it.

"Guy, is that you?"

"Good morning, Professor," was the cordial reply. "Have you found your glasses?"

"Found them? No. The housekeeper will doubtless find them when she gets here."

"Well, that's too bad," sympathized Guy Steel, as he locked the door behind him. "Have you looked all over?"

"I've felt all over."

They moved toward the study, Steel holding to Sanders' arm and gently pushing him along.

"Let's give one good last search," suggested Guy, as he energetically started to peep into all possible and impossible corners.

"It won't do any good," was the pessimistic rejoinder. "I ought to have an extra pair of spectacles, but I never could afford them."

"Now you'll soon be able to afford several hundred pairs."

The young man was feeling along the floor between the desk and the wall. Triumphantly he announced, "But you won't need any extra. Here they are!"

Tears were in the old man's eyes as he wiped the lenses with his handkerchief. He put on the spectacles and gazed at the youth before him.

"Thanks, my boy. It's like coming back to life to get these glasses. You can never know how nearly dead I feel when I can't read, can't write, can't see. I really am partially dead. I'm glad you came; I'm glad you came."

"I'm glad I came, too. Now that we've found your glasses, you can make the tests you promised me."

"Tests I promised you?"

"Don't you remember? You said you'd tell me the character of the owners of five or six thumb-prints; and I've got five of them here."

"Where are they? I'll do them immediately."

Sanders sat down at his desk, turned on the light, and laid out a variety of instruments before him.

"Don't you think I'd better pull up the shades?" inquired Steel, as he placed a strip of rough paper containing the reproductions of five thumb-prints on the desk.

"No! No! Those reporters may still be hovering about."

Sanders looked at the paper before him. He was puzzled.

"These aren't on smoked paper. Smoke the paper, press your thumb on it, and run it through shellac—you know how."

"These were made that way, but I had plates made. It'll work just the same."

PROFESSOR SANDERS was doubtful as to the adequacy of the prints, but he was willing to try them. He set to work measuring. Angles, curves, relations, lengths—all had to be determined and recorded. For two solid hours he kept his attention riveted on the prints; and during these hours not a word was spoken. Mrs. Jones, bent on straightening the study, was shooed away by Steel, who spent the time tiptoeing about the room or gazing over Sanders' shoulders. Finally the measurements were completed.

Referring to a mass of unbound sheets that rested to one side of the desk, the professor explained, "Here is the manuscript of my book, *The Determination of Criminals*. By referring to the charts I have prepared, everything becomes clear. It is merely a matter of classification from now on. Let's take No. 1 first."

He turned to several charts and trailed the particular combination of measurements to its class.

"No. 1 is an innocent man. He will never commit any crimes of violence. He will commit only those acts of petty thievery to which all mankind is addicted. No. 2."

Again he went through the routine of classification.

"No. 2—the same as No. 1. Now we'll take no. 3. . . . No. 3 is a murderer—a cold-blooded murderer who will kill for logical reasons."

Steel, who had jotted down the verdicts in the first two cases, recorded nothing for No. 3. He asked, "You're sure this is No. 3 you're talking about?"

"That is the one."

"You probably got them mixed."

"Don't dare to say that a man of my age and experience could get mixed in such a simple operation! Now, I don't mean that this man has already committed murder; I merely mean that he either has or will."

"But it can't be."

"Why can't it be?" demanded Sanders. "Everything can be. You know the man?"

"Yes."

"And you think his reputation such that he can't ever become a murderer?"

"I know he's as innocent and peaceful a man as ever lived."

"Still, he has killed a human being in cold blood, or will in the future."

"But he—why, Professor Sanders, it's absolutely silly! This man is—why—"

He ended in a laugh.

"I'm sorry if I've exposed one of your friends. That is the penalty we pay for scientific certainty."

"Well, if there's any certainty in this world, it's absolutely certain that No. 3 is not a criminal and never will be."

"Who, then, is the man in whose outward appearance you place more faith than in scientific truth?"

"You."

Professor Sanders looked at Guy Steel for a moment; he had heard the single word but had not grasped its significance.

"I?" he questioned, calmly, with tragic simplicity.

"Oh, Professor, it's all foolishness!"

"That was my thumb-print?"

"Yes; but—"

"There may have been some mistake, but I think not. It has never occurred to me to try my methods on myself. To be certain, let us try again. I'll take the print on smoked paper to be sure."

The professor walked over to the table that stretched along an entire wall, upon which divers instruments of the psychology laboratory rested, attached a strip of prepared paper to the drum, lit the three gas jets that sent blackening flames upon the paper, revolved the drum, and soon had the proper coating of soot. He detached the paper and pressed his thumb on a corner. He did not put the print into shellac to make it permanent, nor did he wash the smutch from his thumb, but set to work immediately with the measurements.

While Sanders worked serenely on, Steel stood behind him, apparently fixed to the spot. The necessary data were collected. The professor turned to his ponderous manuscript. Both men breathed in long-separated gasps while Sanders classified the print.

And then the professor took a deep breath, placed the manuscript to one side, and quietly announced, "There was no mistake."

"Oh, well, every system has some exceptions."

"My system is infallible. There are no exceptions."

"I'm in sort of bad," confided Steel. "You see, I had those five thumb-prints published in last evening's paper; and we announced that you would give the readings."

"Published? Why?"

"Well, Professor, I might as well confess that I'm a reporter and published the entire interview."

"You said you were in business."

"I knew you wouldn't give me the interview if I told you the truth."

"I don't understand why you did that."

The professor meditated for a few minutes before continuing.

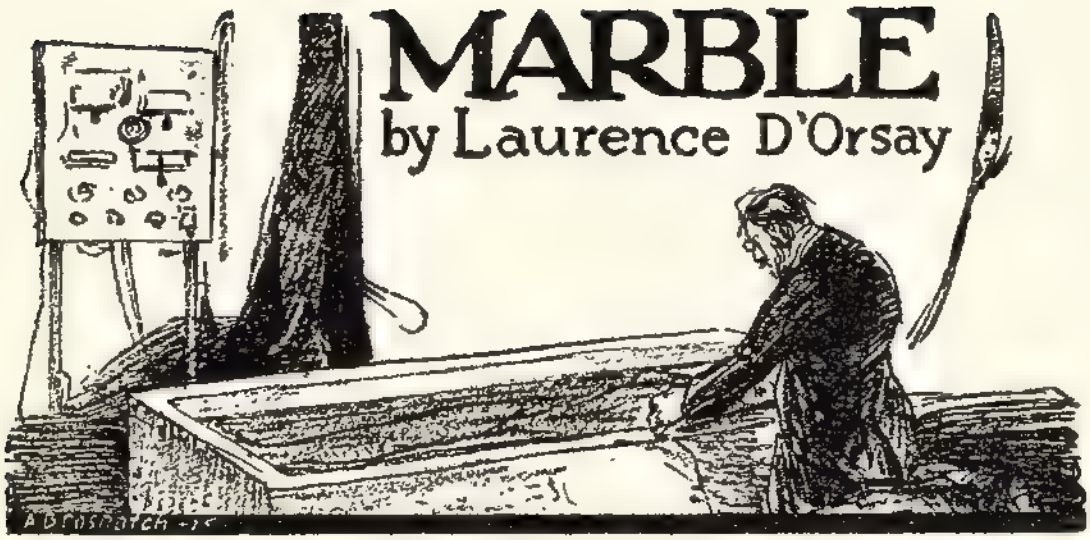
"You say you promised to print the results in your yellow sheet?"

"I'll fake reading for you and Nos. 4 and 5."

"That's true. I haven't finished the last two."

He referred to his charts again, performed the necessary classification,

(Continued on page 475)



MARBLE

by Laurence D'Orsay

Author of "Phantoms"

"I ALWAYS said no good could come of it!" the woman cried with a sob, and then the crowd edged back to the curb, and gazed open-mouthed at the shuttered windows.

"An' you ain't seen your husband since Monday?"

"I ain't set eyes on him. It's just a week today. I said, as he left in the mornin', 'It would be better for you, Fred, if you quit your job at Dr. Lemoine's, because no good can come of it; an' he gives me the willies every time I look at him.' "

"An' what did Fred say?"

"He said, 'Beggars can't be choosers,' an' the doctor paid him well."

"An' you ain't saw him since?"

"No, I ain't, an' I b'lieve he's bein' experimented on."

"Why don't you call the police?"

"I have, an' they are comin' around this mornin'."

The group pressed forward again as a man, accompanied by two officers, entered the square and paused before the gloomy residence.

"Get rid of this gaping crowd, Jenkins," he said; and the crowd, by dint of physical persuasion and repeated instructions to "move on," was hustled to the corner, where it halted to await developments. "Now, Maloney, ring the bell."

Neither the first, second, nor third ring had the slightest effect, except to bring back the crowd, strongly reinforced, until it hung around the steps of the residence.

"Force it," the man said quietly; and in a few minutes the door stood open, and the excited idlers surged forward almost to the doorsteps. "Jenkins, clear this mob out of the street; come along, Maloney."

The door was pulled to behind the two men; the crowd again retreated to the corner, and the officer walked to and fro in front of the house.

The two who had entered glanced into the front room; it, as well as the back room and the upper part of the house, was empty.

"Try the basement, Maloney."

They descended the stairs, and came to a sudden stop as they were met by an unexpected door.

"Sounds like iron," the chief exclaimed, rapping his knuckles against it.

"That's what it is, all right," agreed the officer.

"Knock on it with that bar, and see if anyone's alive in the house."

At the first blow the door was thrown open, and a man clad in shirt and trousers confronted them; a man tall and dark, with face clean-shaven, his hair cut closely to his head, and his shirt-sleeves rolled tightly to his shoulders.

"What the devil's all this racket?" he asked, with some asperity. Then: "Come in." And he closed the door behind them.

The whole place seemed weird and uncanny. The farther end was draped by a long curtain, which hung from the ceiling to the floor; the walls were lined with shelves and cases filled with glass vessels and polished instruments that vividly suggested their own uses, while in a corner alcove stood a life-size statue, a Greek god, in black marble.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion? What do you want? Am I in America, or is this some part of the world where men's homes can be broken into, their scientific researches disturbed by strangers?"

"We are police officers, and here's the search warrant. This house has been without sign of life for a week, and your servant, who entered then, has never left it."

"You mean the man who used to do odd jobs for me? I discharged him some ten days ago, and I haven't seen him since."

"He came here on Monday."

"He did not. Maybe you don't believe me—maybe you think I have murdered him, eh? Of course, you've searched the house. This is my laboratory, and there's only the room through the curtains, there."

The officers stepped forward. The doctor drew back the curtain, and made them a little mocking bow.

"Now, then, look! You see there's no one there, and if you're quite satisfied, I prefer to be left alone. You found your way in, so I suppose you can find it out; and don't forget to close the door."

2

For three years the gloomy house in the square had been vacant—not for rent, but simply vacant, for Dr. Lemoine had been touring in Europe. The missing servant had not been seen since his sudden and mysterious disappearance, and the little gossiping group that once took such a morbid interest in his whereabouts had forgotten him in the excitement of other nine-day wonders, which had flourished and withered in their turn.

But now a change had suddenly come about, for the master of the house was returning.

Brisk, businesslike men measured floors and windows, energetic workmen sat on planks and smoked, and all was ostentatious bustle and activity. Finally the last workman took his leave. Furniture vans arrived and disgorged their contents, which were to transform the dismal dwelling into a habitation fit for a man and woman—for it was rumored that Dr. Lemoine was bringing a wife.

That she was beautiful, the few loungers who were privileged to see the couple descend from the taxicab could not but admit; but they also noted something chilling and repellent in that beauty. There was so much of the doctor's cold, insolent sneer reflected in her face, that it seemed indeed that like had chosen like.

Dr. Lemoine assisted his wife to alight, and she passed up the steps, and then turned and glanced back in icy astonishment as a young woman darted across the road and laid a detaining hand upon her husband's sleeve.

"Have you found him, doctor?"

"Found whom?"

"My husband—Fred, you know—who used to work for you."

"No, no, woman! Go away. How should I have found him?"

But the woman retained her hold of his sleeve.

"You know where he is, Dr. Lemoine!" she cried, fiercely. "You know where he is!"

"Nonsense, I tell you! How should I know?"

"You do know, because you know, as I know, *he's in there!*" And she pointed to the house, an almost insane light in her eyes.

Without further parley, he thrust her aside and passed in.

His wife, moving from the window, turned toward him as he entered.

"Some of your friends seem to have good memories for you," she said, a trifle sneeringly.

"Yes. It's nonsense, of course. Her husband disappeared three years ago, and she thinks I had something to do with it."

"And had you?"

"You're jesting."

"I never jest; least of all with you, for I know that life is nothing to you."

"On the contrary, life interests me. I shall be able to show you some remarkable experiments, now that we are home. I have everything to my hand in my laboratory—everything to aid me in my study of life and death."

"And I, to my horror, have found how little you think of either!"

"True," he said slowly. "I think nothing of either. But it is your homecoming. Forget these trifles, and let me show you the house."

She did not move.

"I wonder why I married you," she said, glaring into his eyes.

"Out of gratitude for my service to your father, of course," he returned lightly.

"I wonder why I did not sooner kill myself!" she burst out, not heeding his thinly-veiled sneer.

"Tush! You talk like a child."

"The first time I saw you, I shuddered, for you were as a blight in the very air; and then, slowly and viciously, you plotted in silence, until you had broken my heart and bought me from my father—until you held him bound hand and foot, and I was the price of your silence."

"You have said all this so many times before," he interjected mockingly, with an evil look.

"And I say it for the last time now," she cried; "for in this house I see death written, and it is yours. A death worthy of such a devil."

"Loud applause from the gallery," he said cynically. "And now for the tour of inspection."

PAUSING before the iron door, the doctor exclaimed: "My laboratory—or what you perhaps would call my torture chamber! Do you care to see it before science resumes her researches?"

She inclined her head, entered as he switched on the lights, and gazed coldly around the room, aware that her husband's eye was upon her to catch a tremor of the lips that would show a spark of fear. Suddenly, with a gasp she fell back a pace, pointing with trembling hand to the corner, where a curtain on a brass rod cut off a portion of the room.

"Who is behind there?" she cried wildly. "Who is behind there?"

He crossed the room, pulled back the curtain, and faced her.

"Not quite as brave as you thought yourself to be, are you? But you are frightened at nothing," he chuckled. "A statue in black marble is enough to set you trembling. Come nearer and examine it. Come and see with what truly marvelous accuracy every

vein, every muscle and tendon is carved upon the stone."

"Who did it?"

"I—from life. You did not know I excelled in sculpture as well as the arts."

"It's a wonderful piece of work," she whispered, attracted in spite of herself, struggling to regain her composure, and not knowing why an icy fear still seemed to grip her heart. "Very true to life."

"Very true, indeed. Give me your hand."

He took her hand, and placed it upon the arm of the statue.

"There," he said, quietly, "you can almost fancy you feel the muscles beneath the skin, almost fancy that arm once moved. It is, as you say, very true to life."

She suddenly went white as death. With a cry of terror she dragged her hand from his grasp, and, clutching the table for support, leaned back against it, utterly unnerved by the nameless horror of the revelation that had all at once come to her.

"Is he—it—like the missing man?" she gasped at last.

Dr. Lemoine pursed his lips, and eyed the statue critically.

"H'm! It is strange," he answered, after a moment's hesitation. "But now you mention it, there *is* a likeness."

He offered her his arm. She recoiled from him, shuddering.

"That is the result of my greatest experiment. You heard of the missing man they're still worrying me about?"

He jerked his head meaningly toward the statue. She was still looking at him with a horror in her eyes that deepened with every word he uttered.

"It is not true!" she cried at last. "You are trying to drive me insane!"

"Nonsense!" he returned slowly. "It's true enough. That's the missing man—and I defy the world to find it out!"

His face flushed with the dull blaze of passion, and he caught her by the wrist and twisted her around until her eyes looked into his.

"And remember this, Evelyn: let there be no more of this childish folly. Your threats, which you have been pleased to hurl at me since you imagined you had penetrated some of my—well—scientific secrets, do not frighten me. I know that you would betray me if you could, for the interests of science are nothing to you; and I shall be on my guard and make very sure that you are not given the opportunity. And as sure as you stand before me, at your first attempt I will kill you, and you shall be the companion statue on the pedestal. Remember that, Evelyn!"

3

"WHAT do you think of the wine, Hendrickson?"

"Splendid bouquet; '94 Château Yquem, isn't it?"

The man held his glass to the light.

"No, quite a modern vintage. Treated by my own process."

"What a wonderful fellow you are, Lemoine!—always doing something to astound people; always inventing or discovering something."

"Pshaw! You can't call an artificial maturing of wine an invention; but I have one or two inventions with which some day I mean to surprize the world. The illumination of this room, and, indeed, the whole house, is one of my secrets; those electric bulbs will burn for years without renewal or attention. Electricity as men know it is nothing; as I know it, it is a power that can control the world, that can prolong man's life beyond his wildest dreams, and then preserve his body unalterable for all time. It beats the much-vaunted embalming processes of the ancient Egyptians."

He frowned under his eyebrows at his wife, sitting opposite to him.

"Then you have invented a process to arrest decay?"

Dr. Hendrickson's tone betrayed surprize, incredulity.

"Yes. It will be made public after my death—not before."

A trembling sigh came from Mrs. Lemoine. She rested her arms on the table and leaned toward her husband, the color going and coming in her cheeks.

"You own you have invented a process to arrest decay in the human body after death?" she said slowly. "You own it, before your friends?"

Her excitement was all but uncontrollable.

"Certainly," he returned, carelessly flicking the ash from his cigar.

"Wonderful!" Dr. Hendrickson exclaimed involuntarily. "Mrs. Lemoine, your husband is a remarkable man. You must be proud of him."

"Proud of him!"

She bent toward the visitor, twisting her fingers in the tablecloth in her agitation.

"Proud of him! I hate him. I loathe him! He is right; he speaks truly; he has invented such a process—a process which enables him to slay men with impunity, and to change them into black and shining marble! He is indeed a remarkable man!"

The two guests gazed in amazement at the woman. She had risen from her seat, and with dilated eyes stood pointing at her husband, who sat imperturbably in his chair smoking his cigar.

"My dear Evelyn," he said, coldly, at last, "you have another of your hysterical fits coming on. You are overwrought and excited. If you would rather retire, we will excuse you."

She paid no heed, but turned her eyes full on him.

"I denounce you!" she cried wildly, "—denounce you before your guests as a murderer—the murderer of the man who was in your employ three years ago! They scoured the continent for him, and he was never found, and why? Because he never left this house! Because he is here now! I dare you to take your friends, scientists like yourself, to your laboratory and show them the black statue—the body of the man you murdered, as you would murder me—" Her voice rose shrilly as she turned toward the others. "Protect me, save me, Dr. Hendrickson, Dr. Werber!" she cried wildly. "Ever since I accidentally stumbled upon one of his dreadful secrets, shortly after our marriage a month ago, I have been held a close prisoner, and when last night I divined the secret of the *thing* in there"—she pointed a shaking finger in the direction of the laboratory—"he threatened—"

Dr. Lemoine frowned and looked perplexedly at his guests.

"I am sorry, my dear friends," he exclaimed, rising and laying a hand on the shoulder of each. "It is very unfortunate—poor girl! You understand, of course. Would you mind humoring her? Will you come and see the statue that frightens her? It's a magnificent piece of work, a Greek god I bought in Italy."

And he led the way to his laboratory.

With eyes that keenly appreciated, the two guests glanced around the room, at the various appliances and delicate instruments that filled the cases along the walls, at the strange-looking coils and other apparatus, the purposes and uses of which even they could not divine.

"Here," cried Dr. Lemoine, walking to the alcove screened by the curtain, "is the statue. Lifelike, I grant you, startlingly lifelike. But that is all. Behold!"

With a flourish almost melodramatic, he flung back the curtain, and the

light gleamed upon the polished figure —the Greek god with his arms folded on his breast.

"Well, what do you think of my statue?"

"Your victim!"

Unnoticed, the doctor's wife had entered.

"Hush, Evelyn! You alarm my friends."

"It is magnificent!" exclaimed Dr. Werber. Hendrickson, too, stood rooted to the spot. But he gave no sign beyond a slight start, unnoticed by the others. His eyes swept from the statue to the wife of his host, and there was in them an inscrutable expression.

"Magnificent!" he echoed then.

"Yes," continued Lemoine, proudly, "it is life itself. Look how the muscles stand out on the arms, the veins in the hands and temples. Observe the folds of the girdle. Is it not superb? And yet, it is only marble. *Only marble,* Evelyn."

He picked up a tiny pestle from the table. "Test it, Werber."

"My dear Lemoine—"

"To gratify her. Perhaps it will soothe her."

Dr. Werber placed his hand on the smooth, cold surface of the statue, and lightly tapped it.

"It's a human body!" the doctor's wife cut in shrilly. "Can't you see it is a body, or are you blind?"

"My dear Mrs. Lemoine, no. You must forget all about that. It's only a beautiful piece of work in marble."

"You fool! You blind fool!"

"Evelyn, how dare you?"

Lemoine's hand closed on her arm with a grip as of a vise.

"Don't excite her, Lemoine, please. It's very unfortunate."

"It's marble, Evelyn, don't you understand? Marble! Marble! Marble!" and the doctor struck the figure with his fist as he shouted and glared at his wife. "I am expecting a companion to it, Evelyn—a Venus. I've waited too long for it, but I will have it within a week."

There were hidden meanings, for his wife alone, in all that Dr. Lemoine said during the remainder of the evening, and she answered back, scorn for scorn, hate for hate, and contempt for his contempt. She was no longer afraid of him; she remembered the look of understanding in Dr. Hendrickson's eyes.

4

Dr. Lemoine had received the half-suggested, half-expressed sympathy of his departing friends with the quiet dignity suitable to the circumstances, and now he bolted the door and descended direct to his laboratory. He was conscious of a deep contempt for scientists in general as he recalled his momentary uneasiness when, his hand forced by his wife's accusations, he had stood side by side with his two colleagues before the statue. It was well, he told himself, that some scientists were fools.

But Evelyn was dangerous to him. He had complacently thought himself secure by virtue of the fact that he did not leave her out of his sight; but the contretemps this evening had convinced him of his fallacy.

He passed into the inner room. There came a sound of basketwork creaking as a big jar was dragged across the floor, and then a running and splashing as liquid poured into a bath. The furnace threw out a ruddy glow, and the doctor took off his coat and vest, and worked in the red light as the heat of the room increased.

Next he attached wires to one of the strange instruments at which his guests had marveled, and the opposite ends to plates, which he cast into the bath. Then he lit a cigar, started the battery, and waited.

Perhaps a quarter of an hour later, he dipped a rod into the liquid, and, withdrawing it, gazed with triumph-

ant satisfaction at the black, shining glaze with which it had become coated. He placed it on one side, and passed into the outer room.

For a moment he stood listening at the door of the laboratory, then stealthily he began to move up the stairs. The house was silent. Through the long transom over the hall-door a struggling moonbeam threw a narrow ribbon of light upon the polished floor. Outside, a footstep passed, and faded away. The clock struck 2.

Slowly he ascended toward his wife's room. And then, in the blackness of the staircase, he became conscious of the presence of another person, heard the suppressed breathing of someone hiding in the darkest corner and fearful of discovery.

The doctor's hand crept to his pocket and withdrew a vial. Holding it well away from his face, he poured the contents upon a handkerchief, and again stood listening, every muscle of his body tense. Yes, there was someone! Instinctively he knew it was his wife—perhaps creeping down to him as he was creeping up to her; coming by stealth to kill him as he worked in his laboratory.

He sprang forward, and gripped her by the throat as she passed by him. There was an instant's struggle as he held the handkerchief over her mouth, pressing it down viciously, with all his might; a moan, stifled in its birth; and she dropped limply to the floor with a shuddering gurgle.

Half carrying, half dragging the body, he descended to the laboratory. He turned the switch. The lighting system had somehow failed.

"Damn!" he muttered savagely, groping in the darkness; "at this time, above all others—and I boasted that it was perfect."

He passed into the inner room, where the crimson glow from the furnace gave just sufficient light to enable him to discern the outline of the bath on the floor. Gradually and carefully he lowered his burden, until it lay full length on the bottom and the liquid rose almost to the edge.

Then he returned to the outer chamber, and by the flare of an alcohol lamp set himself to repair the defect in the lighting system.

With a startled exclamation he suddenly wheeled around, and glanced fearfully at the door, whence he fancied a slight sound had come. The curtain of the empty alcove was swaying slightly, and he began cautiously to advance toward it; then the half-open door caught his eye, and with a sneer at his own nerves he pushed it to, and bent again to his task.

A little longer, and the room blazed with light once more, and he walked into the inner chamber and gazed into the bath.

At the bottom there lay a figure seemingly cut from black marble.

A LONG-DRAWN sigh came from immediately behind him, and he turned with a cry of terror.

"Evelyn!"

He must be insane, haunted! He gripped the side of the bath and stared down into it.

Yes, there was the woman—but now he saw that it was not Evelyn, but the wife of the man standing behind that curtain—the two of them now turned to everlasting stone.

And even as his eyes sought the curtain, it parted. Paralyzed, unable to move or speak, he stared at Dr. Hendrickson, who, with a constable and a tall plain-clothes man, was advancing toward him.

"Game's up, Dr. Lemoine," said the plain-clothes man, quite impersonally. "You fooled me three years ago—remember? But I think we've got the goods on you this time. . . . I arrest you for unlawful restraint of your wife's person, on complaint sworn to by Dr. Hendrickson here, and on suspicion of murder. Bring him along, Maloney!"

The Monotonous Ticktack of the Timepiece Filled Him with Unreasoning Rage

THE CLOCK

By ARTHUR STYRON

Author of "The Lip"

ALL my life I have had a deep and abiding dread of monotony. The unvarying and wearisome sameness of life irks me and fills me with depression. I fear and hate all men because I am compelled to shun them in order to avoid that hideous mother of monotony, Habit, which tears my nerves to shreds and flings them mockingly in my twitching face. Regularity of any sort fills me with resentment and impotent rage against the scheme of things. The steady patter of raindrops drives me, hysterical and gibbering, to bury my face amongst the pillows, under a mattress—any place where the steady drip-drop, drip-drop, is not audible. The sound of drum-beats fills me with such uncontrolled rage and fury that I shriek aloud in my distress, and hurl stones or any missiles available at the miscreants who dare to provoke me. I cannot—I dare not—I will not—endure drab uniformity! My imaginative and excitable temperament demands variety.

Since I am thus constituted, is it any wonder that clocks fill me with hatred and terror?—those prosaic engineers of space, with their dreadful, unfailing cadence, their ceaseless vigil over man's allotted time, their steady and untiring ticktack, ticktack, toward eternity! They terrify me—poison me—madden me!—those hideous reminders of inexorable Time—Time, the faithful ally of unrelenting and unyielding Death!

I LIVED alone with an old woman who had taken me when I was a child, from a foundlings' home. Her I loved in a way, for she was kind, and very old and feeble. Yet she always insisted upon regularity,—eating, sleeping and working at set times. And when I undertook to vary my life from day to day, such as retiring at noon, and rising for breakfast at midnight, in order that I might thus break the monotony of my existence, I met with such determined opposition from the old woman that her, too, I began to fear and hate.

The house in which we lived was an old, rambling country place, of splendid and pretentious proportions, though with an air of pervading gloom and loneliness. The furnishings were mostly heirlooms and antiques of great beauty and value, of which the old woman was very proud.

Among the chattels were two ancient and costly clocks, of rare and unusual design and workmanship. They stood side by side in the great hall, tall, grim and spectral, regulating the household by their minute divisions of space. At least, one of them did so. The other had not run for many, many years. The old woman had frequently related to me how that one had stopped at a quarter past midnight, the very minute—ay, the

very second—her husband had died: stopped of its own accord, so she said, or by the hand of some unseen guest! With her own hands she cared for and cleaned and polished the two clocks. Every night, with unvarying regularity, she wound the *living* clock, which, she told me with the utmost confidence, would stop at the moment of her death just as the other one had stopped when her husband died!

Is it any wonder, then, that I feared these damnable machines almost as much as I hated them? I might have borne the awe and dread with which I regarded them, but the continual ticking of the living clock—the old woman's life-piece, as I called it—lashed my nerves to such a state of frenzy that, goaded beyond endurance, I would rush, trembling and screaming, from the house, into the night, the cold, the storm—anywhere, anywhere, away from that gruesome monotony, that eternal cadence! . . .

There was a chime, too; a chime that gave out a thick, gloomy, resonant sound, filling me with foreboding and terror; a sound that brought to mind grim death and a grimmer reckoning; that told of unsubdued passions and stern retribution. Each quarter the time increased until upon the hour it became a complete stanza. So gruesome was the effect of this music upon my imagination that I could not rid my thoughts of it: I could not sleep, I could not rest; always I was anticipating, waiting for the next installment. Sometimes in the small of the night I would creep from my sleepless bed and crouch in the dark, chilly hall, in order that I might hear the ticking and chiming more plainly, waiting for the dreadful music to start again, and then for the next sound, and the next, and so on until morning. . . At times I would make a determined effort to throw off the spell: I would say to myself, "After the next quarter chimes I shall hurry to bed and fall asleep before it sounds again." Then as soon as the quarter's direful melody had ceased, I would hasten to my room, shivering with cold and nervousness, and lie with tightly closed eyes, courting sleep. But big, pointed hands would clutch at my heart; brassy voices would laugh musically and mockingly in my ears until, unable to endure it longer, I would rush back to the dark, cold hall where I could count the steady ticktacks and listen for the unvarying chime the rest of the long night!

As time wore on, I realized that my condition was becoming grave. Thoughts of destroying the clock occupied me constantly, but I could not do it, because I feared the frightful thing with all my soul.

On one occasion I did approach the old woman with cunning and clever arguments as to why she herself should stop the clock, but she indignantly refused. After that, so it seemed to me, I began to detect her stealing furtive and suspicious glances at me. She suspected my trouble! She knew! Dear God, I verily believe she knew my suffering and agony, and yet she would not stop that fiendish clock! So I began to burn with a remorseless hatred for the old woman; a desire for revenge.

Then it was that I cunningly devised a scheme to appease my hatred of the old woman and rid myself of the monster at the same time. The old woman had said that the clock *would stop of its own accord when she died!* Very well. In this way she should accomplish what she had refused to do, and what I myself feared to do.

Yes, I resolved to kill the old woman. I felt sorry for her, because she had been kind to me, and she was very old and feeble; but she stood between me and my happiness and she must die! That very night I would per-

petrate the deed and rid myself forever of this lesion upon my soul! . . .

After dark I began to make my arrangements. They were very simple. The house stood in a lonely neighborhood. No one would hear. The old woman was very aged and infirm, and could make no resistance. . .

She retired early, as was her wont, and I went to my room to listen and wait. I planned to wait until the midnight hour had struck and then accomplish the deed before the clock should begin another day with its quarter's melody.

Hardly breathing, I crouched in my room until the midnight hour had struck; waited until the last note of the awful dirge had faded into the dreadful stillness of the night. Then, carrying in my hands a small hatchet, I made my way stealthily toward the old woman's room. I moved very slowly and cautiously, inch by inch, creeping on my hands and knees so as to make no sound. On my way I paused before the tall, grim clock to gloat.

"Monster!" I gibbered in a high, thin voice (for I did not wish the old woman to hear and become alarmed). "Fiend! Damned soul! Never again will you raise your hellish voice! Never again shall I tremble and shake with terror at your taunting melody! Never again—for soon you will be forever stilled!

In my excitement, I had unconsciously allowed my voice to rise to a shrill, piercing treble. Rage possessed me. I rose to my feet and shook my fist at its evil shape. I screamed maledictions and curses at it, and laughed with fiendish joy and triumph.

"Agent of Hell!" I shrieked, brandishing my hatchet, and dancing about in a frenzy of hate; "you have spoken your last! You shall never, *never*, use your brassy lungs again!"

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when on the clear, dread stillness of the night there broke a sound—hoarse, bold, mocking!—a sound that froze my blood, that made my hair rise with terror, that filled me with surging fury. I had miscalculated my time *because I had not gone by the clock!* The demon was beginning to strike the quarter—to mock me! Beginning—but no more! For with the first note such a wave of rage and loathing swept over me—hatred of the monster, and fury at having been thwarted in my plans—that I forgot my fear, forgot everything save that I was mad! I uttered an awful cry and leapt upon it. With superhuman strength I dashed it to the floor, where it fell with a terrific crash. Shrieking invectives, I tore into its vitals with my bare hands, destroying, mangling.

"Devil," I raved, "you shall not speak! You *shall* not! *You shall—NOT!*"

In a few minutes it was a complete wreck. It lay on the floor, bruised, broken, seeming, in my excited imagination, like a murdered thing.

Laughing loudly and shrilly, and clutching in my wounded and blood-stained hands the remnants of the mutilated machine, I rushed to the old woman's room.

She lay quietly on the bed, gazing at me with horror-dilated eyes.

"See," I screamed, throwing the bloody remnants upon the floor. "See, old woman! There is your clock! Now it will hardly stop when you die! Ha, ha!"

Then a strange feeling of awe crept over me. I ceased raving and looked intently at the old woman. In the pale light of a flickering candle I could see that she still gazed at me with horror-dilated eyes, but now I saw that they were sightless. The old woman was dead! She had died when the clock stopped!

Boston, Mass.,
July 26, 1924.

ROBERT N. WILLIS, Attorney at Law,
New York City.

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 15th inst. received requesting information regarding Thornton Hartley. You say that you have been retained to defend the will which some of the relatives are endeavoring to break on the grounds of insanity.

Mr. Hartley was no more insane than I am. I was his best friend and am acquainted with the circumstances which led up to the making of his curious will.

I believe that the opposing relatives are basing their assertion on the clause relating to the disposal of the body. Knowing the circumstances, I do not think that this is more strange than a clause would have been directing the erection of a certain type of tombstone.

If you are at all acquainted with Egyptian antiquities, you know that this was the usual mode of burial among the higher class of the ancient people. I know of the Egyptian whom he designates to embalm his body. This man has studied the ancient practise and is, in my opinion, capable of performing it. In view of the time required, the difficulty of the art and the cost of the necessary drugs and spices, I do not consider his price of $10,000 exorbitant.

The tomb in which he wishes his body to be sealed was purchased by Mr. Hartley a year ago from the Egyptian government, together with the land about it. The deed must be among his papers.

I certainly believe that, in view of his convictions at the time of his death, his wishes in this matter should be respected.

I enclose a series of letters from him which may throw a bit of light on the situation. Please return them when you have finished, as they are the last he ever wrote me.

If there is any other way in which I may be of assistance, do not fail to call upon me.

Very truly yours,
John S. Mills.

1

Cairo, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

Your archeological soul would positively revel in Cairo this year. They have opened three new tombs (unofficially, up the river) and the

shops are glutted with all sorts of wonderful things—and cheap, too. It's not the season for tourists and you can pick up what you want for a song—if you can barter *à l' Egypte.*

Come on—leave that dry-as-dust monograph on Egypt of the Ptolemies and sun yourself in the land itself. That important (?) treatise can wait —forever, and the world will never miss it. But you can only live once. Come on, you withered fossil, "eat of the lotus" as I have done and forget your troubles.

And if you must collect—why, collect! Heaven knows there was never a better time. If you won't come and loaf, come and work. Take my word for it, you can pick up treasures for your musty old museum on every side.

Why (and now turn sea-green with envy), only this afternoon I found a wonder—a ring—turquoise in a silver setting, but carved (imagine it!) with a head—a woman's head!

Yes, I know it's impossible—that it wasn't done—and that it's a fake. But it isn't. The dealer didn't call the gods to witness that it was genuine. He went out and got the man who brought it down the river, and the man was too ignorant to lie. So I believe.

And you can't have it for your collection! So don't try to belittle it.

I place it during the Empire. I can't figure just where, but the hair is dressed in the fashion of that period. It's a wonder. I mean the ring, of course, but the same describes the face, which is unbelievably lifelike.

Jack, old man, if you could show me a woman like that today you'd never have the chance to call me a "cold proposition" and impervious to feminine charm. Why, I half believe I'm in love with her now.

Laugh, darn you, laugh! I guess I have a right to fall in love with a woman three or four thousand years old if my wayward heart is so impelled. At any rate it's safer than to lose my head over a girl of the present day, and interferes less with my own work and (oh, I admit it!) pleasure.

Her name is Nitocris. It's carved in a cartouche in the back of the stone. Of course, it can't be the Nitocris of Babylonian fame, and she is far too sweet to be the Nitocris of Egypt who retaliated in kind on the murderers of her brother. No, Jack, it's some other Nitocris.

Well, since you have been so kind as to let me rave, I'll repeat my invitation. Come and join me here in paradise. If you don't, may your dusty soul dry up and blow away.

THORN.

2

Cairo, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

I don't suppose my last has had time to reach you. But this is to prepare you for the coming of a scarab of the Ptolemaic period, which part of Egyptian history you seem to claim *in toto.* Down on your knees and thank me! You're welcome. Arise!

I must tell you of a strange coincidence. Or, after all, I suppose it's neither strange nor a coincidence. Any number of things from a given tomb may drift down to the shops just after the tomb is opened.

You remember the fair vision that adorns a silver ring I spoke of in my last letter? Well, I have something else from the same beautiful unknown. I picked it up yesterday. It's a little votive bowl and I know it was hers because it has the same cartouche that is on the ring. I suppose her husband or some relative must have placed it in the offering room of her tomb filled with food or something. It was empty, of course, when I got it. I shouldn't be surprized if we ourselves ate the contents among the other mummified products that Mrs. Mulkins served her ten "collige"

boys—oh, it wasn't so many years ago.

Her husband! I wonder whether she was married. (Of course I mean Nitocris, not Mrs. Mulkins, who had a husband even if he was a useless incumbrance.) Now, I suppose, you will make my life miserable by accusing me of jealousy. Imagine being jealous of a man long since gone to the gods in whom he believed (or elsewhere), and over a woman who died several thousand years ago!

Oh, yes. I know such an accusation was the farthest thing from your thoughts. But I also know your bantering vein and that it is safest to steal your thunder before you are ready to storm. Still, I can't help wondering whether she *was* married.

She is not Egyptian—or, at least, pure Egyptian. I've studied the features on the ring pretty carefully and they are different. I should say, at a guess, that either she or some of her ancestors came from north of the Mediterranean. But whatever she is, she is beautiful.

I suppose you wouldn't give me a moment's peace if I should fall in love with her, now, would you?

Well, if you'll only join me here you may joke me as much as you like. If my first letter wasn't strong enough, let this persuade you to come.

THORN.

3

Cairo, Egypt.

DOUBTING THOMAS, ESQ.:

I knew you wouldn't believe it. Yea, verily, I swear it is true! There is such a ring—and it's genuine. Otherwise, why should that cartouche turn up so frequently? I've found several things marked with it—one of them a bit of stone, evidently a part of the tomb wall that had been chipped off.

In fact, the fair one from the past is haunting me most inconsiderately. It's almost as if her ring (which, by the way, I am wearing) attracted other things that have been associated with her. Even when there is nothing to indicate it, I am often sure that I am handling something that came from her tomb.

And, Jack, she was not married! Or, at least, I do not think so. Three days ago I came across a little scrap of papyrus. In fact, a dealer with whom I have done much trading gave it to me as unsalable. It was from her tomb. And, Jack, she is a princess! I might have known it!

Harken unto the papyrus.

Anupu, son of Ramses, the King, hath purchased from the Priests of the Great Temple of Thebes acquittal in the Judgment Hall of Osiris for his sister, Nitocris.

There! Had she been married her husband would have taken care of that. Had her brother been her husband as well (atrocious custom!), he would have called her "wife", not "sister". The only chance is that she had a husband (lucky man!) who died before she did. I am hoping for the best.

Oh, I admit I'm foolish. But I can't help it. I am becoming interested in this woman of ages ago. At first, without any volition on my part, she seemed to be seeking me out. Now I am doing the seeking. I have ransacked every shop in the city and I won't give up until I have solved the mystery.

For it is a mystery, old man, when a princess of centuries gone by "sets her cap" for you—even if she isn't doing it intentionally.

Anyway, I'm going to accept her challenge.

Of course I'm sorry you can't come over now. You could be a lot of help in cutting this Gordian knot. But, selfishly enough, I'm rather glad you can't. You're a bit more ardent than I; and if I am susceptible to her charms, where would you be?—and then I'd have to worry about a rival.

As it is, having disposed of a husband to my entire satisfaction, I'm quite carefree.

But if there is any chance you can come, come ahead and I'll give you a hearty joust for the favor of Miss Nitocris of a thousand odd, B. C.

And, by the way, I haven't the least idea what the "odd" is, for there is no indication of which Ramses had the happiness to be her father.

If you can keep your jibes corked up, I'll go on giving you the history of my "wild romance," but any more references to "the sparkling eye of withered age" and you shall never, never meet the charming bride I am going to conjure from the mists of antiquity—which is not to say that I shall meet her myself.

THORN.

4

Cairo, Egypt.

SIR SKEPTIC:

I've seen her—what have you to say to that? That is, I've seen her statue. It's in the Cairo museum. It is evidently the statue that was placed in the *serdab* of her tomb to do the work she is supposed to do in the Valley of Yaru. It did the work for me.

Oh, Jack, she's beautiful! The man was an artist who did that statue, restricted though he was by the hereditary Egyptian ideas of art. The ring didn't begin to do her justice. And she's *not* married, for the inscription (there is one) on the statue reads—

Nitocris, the Unwed, Daughter of Ramses, the King.

And there are several other statues grouped with it—evidently most of the family from her chamber of statues. Why, oh, why, was I born three thousand years too late? Call me sentimental, but I wish I had been incarnated a thousand and something, B. C., even if it was only as a sacred cat, to worship from a distance. For, if a cat may look at a king, it may certainly gaze upon a princess.

As to the finding of the statue, it was due to my own thickheadedness that I did not find it long ago. I might have known that the large furnishings of the tomb could not be smuggled out. As might have been expected, the government confiscated everything it could lay its hands upon (the rifling of the tombs having been unofficial) and put it in the state museum.

There was a brief paragraph in the papers this morning announcing that a new exhibit would be opened to the public this afternoon. Of course I was there—but without an idea that I should see my princess.

I recognized her as soon as I came into the room—and they had to put me out when the doors closed.

Jack, you have no idea of her beauty! The pure Egyptian type is not especially appealing to the Western eye. But that foreign strain in her blood has retained all the good features and added that touch of, I suppose, the Indo-European that brings it to our ideals.

Yet even her statue is more attractive than any woman I have ever met. While the hair and, in a measure, the body have been conventionalized, the face is as perfect as if it were molded from a life mask. She is dressed in the gauzy draperies of ancient Egypt and the sculptor has reproduced them wonderfully well. With all respect, Jack, her body is as beautiful as her face, and the dress of Milady of Old Egypt allowed one to judge.

Jack, I'd give everything I possess if I could play Pygmalion to this Egyptian Galatea and if Venus (or Isis, in this case, I suppose) would only breathe into her statue the breath of life.

Idiotic or not, Jack, tomorrow I am going to look up the men who exca-

vated her tomb and visit it myself. Perhaps I may have real news for you in my next letter.

THORN.

5

Karnak, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

I've found the tomb, but there are so many important developments that the best thing to do is to tell you everything just as it happened.

It was not easy to find anyone who would admit having been in the party that rifled the tombs, as the police are on the watch for them. Finally, through the dealer who sold me the ring, I found a man, Mehemet Ali, who was willing to take me there—for a consideration.

Curiously enough, her tomb is in the Valley of Kings and not with those of the queens or nobles. The two other tombs that were opened are on the side of the range facing the river, but hers is in the valley itself. The vandals, it seems, saw one corner of the door peeping from a pile of débris that had once more than covered it, but had weathered down. Dynamite, I imagine from the condition of things, was the "Open Sesame," for, of course, the tomb was hermetically sealed.

It was the usual sort of tomb hollowed out of the rock—with one exception. First, was the chapel. The massive stone stele before which the offerings were placed was still in position, but everything else had been removed. I suppose this was too heavy to move, though even it will probably not stay long.

The *serdab* was quite empty. Every statue had been taken from this chamber and the *ka* of my princess (assuming that the soul, or double, if you will does dwell there) must have wept at the barrenness of it.

The curious part of the whole business is this: try as I would, I could not find the shaft that leads down to the burial chamber. Nor was I especially dense, for pick marks on the walls and floor showed where the discoverers had searched unsuccessfully. They had even pried the great stone stele a little from the wall on the chance that the shaft entrance might be hidden there. But, of course, it was the usual false door built against the solid rock wall.

So, you see, my princess still rests in her sarcophagus safe from vandal hands. And how to reach her tomb is my next problem.

The hieroglyphics? Yes, of course I know all about her now. I won't translate the yards and yards descriptive of her journey through this life and contemplated trials and tribulations in the next. But I'll give you a brief sketch.

Nitocris was the daughter of Ramses I, which would date her about 1315 B. C. Her mother was "of the north," and her representation shows just what I expected—that she is Indo-European. Nitocris was evidently quite a student and more or less of a mystic, I gather from the hieroglyphics. She was "The Unwed" in spite of the fact that she had many suitors (I counted no less than a hundred and thirty-two carved in this interesting page of her sculptured life) because "he will come from a land far to the west." He never came and she died at twenty-three still "The Unwed."

Now if I am the "he" from the "land far to the west" (and I can't help thinking it rather a coincidence), I arrived just about 2,230 years too late. Of course I can plead that I didn't know of the engagement, but no woman could forgive such indifference as that.

THORN.

6

Karnak, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

I hardly know how to tell you what has happened. I hardly know

what to make of everything myself. I'm afraid you will laugh and call me a sentimental, idiotic fool. You will believe what I say, but you will not believe my interpretation of it—you will explain it all away in a perfectly rational way—something which can't be done. I am in Egypt, and you are in the United States, as many thousand miles away as my princess is years from me—or was, so I thought. Call me a fool, then, if you like, but listen to the story.

She is mine! She is mine in so far as the Egyptian government has authority and power to sell her to me. Yes, I bought her—and I'm ashamed. Yet what else was there to do? Someone else would have found her and then she would have been exhibited in a glass case in some museum for the thousands to gaze upon, while her soul trembled at the immodesty of it.

I bought government permission to excavate the tomb. Money and influence will do wonders—and I have a little of both. The permission, of course, gives me the right to everything I find in the tomb, and her body is still there. I found it. It is mine. Thus far can I claim my princess. And, Jack, there is more. But that later.

I began my search for the burial shaft at once. We went over floor and walls thoroughly again, but with no more success than before. Our lanterns gave very poor light, however, and finally, a week ago, I began an extensive examination with a powerful electric torch.

Finally I found—you will never guess—that the shaft, instead of leading down from the chapel, was in the floor of the *serdab*. One of the pick blows had penetrated to the rock floor and at the bottom of the nick I could just see a faint line of division in the rock.

I called the men at once, and before we left off work that day we had uncovered and removed the stone that sealed the entrance. The shaft, as usual, had been filled with gravel. Yesterday we finished removing this —a colossal task (it was a fifty-foot shaft); but I couldn't wait and I drove the men like slaves, I'm afraid. Before night we had removed the door to the burial chamber and I let the men go with orders not to report for two days. They had earned a rest and I wanted to examine the chamber myself—alone.

I went over the room carefully. Everything seemed to be intact. Finally, on the cover of the sarcophagus, I found an inscription. The important part reads:

> I, Nitocris, Daughter of Ramses, the King, have waited three and twenty years for the man from a land far to the West. The ka left my body and he had not come. I have prayed to Osiris that my ka may not begin the long journey before he comes and Osiris has heard me.

I looked at my watch. It was 11 o'clock. I had been so interested that I had not noticed the passage of time. I might have gone on down to the camp—but I didn't. First, it was very late. Then, I wanted to resume investigations first thing in the morning. And, finally, now that the burial chamber had been uncovered, the tomb was worth robbing again and I could not be sure even of my own men.

So I merely climbed the steps to the *serdab*, found some sacking we had in which to pack anything we might find, and went to sleep on the floor. I had intended to unwrap the mummy this morning, but I have not opened the outer case—and I never shall.

You will call what happened last night an ordinary dream. A dream it may have been. Certainly my mind has been filled with my princess for months. I realize that I am run down from the intensity of the search. I grant that everything had reached a climax and my nerves were near the breaking point.

On the other hand, I assure you that the dream was more vivid than any I ever had. Granted one premise, the Egyptian theory of death, it was logical and consistent. And remember I was sleeping in the *serdab*, the room in which the *ka*—the soul—is supposed to dwell.

I was again conscious of the *serdab*. (That is the best expression I can give to the sensation.) It was exactly as I had seen it last—but there was a presence there. Jack, it was my princess—or her soul. If the face on the ring was beautiful, if the statue was enchanting, words cannot express the beauty and the witchery of the being or vision that now stood before me. I cannot describe her; save that she was beauty itself—all the allurement of the East—all dreams and ideals incarnate. I cannot write about it.

She pleaded with me not to desecrate her tomb. I say she pleaded—yet I do not believe she spoke in words. It seemed as if we had cast off the shackles of language and each was conscious of the other's thoughts.

But her eyes! They were as appealing as those of some wounded fawn; and their soft, dark glance tore my heart-strings apart. Then I knew the depths of self-hate and abasement to which a man may descend. I saw the filth on my hands and the filth in my heart to have broken into the tomb of this radiant being.

And in her eyes was patience—superhuman patience—the patience that had waited, century after century, for "him" that was to come.

Then, suddenly, I knew that at last "he" *had* come—that I was "he." And I knew that I loved her with all the ardor of my heart and every atom of my being. I knew that I would wait forever for "her"—that she was my heart and my soul—that through eternity I would remember that instant.

And she knew. Golden flames sprang into her eyes. She came toward me. In another moment we two, separated by the ages, would have been in each other's arms—when I was awakened.

It was one of the fellahs. My absence had caused a stir in the camp and they had been afraid something had happened to me.

I suppose the poor man couldn't realize why I sent him packing back to camp so angrily when he had meant it all in kindness. But you can imagine how I felt. And I could not get to sleep again.

Jack, I don't know what to do! It may have been a mere dream, but I incline to the theory that in the subconscious state of sleep I can communicate with her soul. You cannot make me believe otherwise.

Dream or not, I shall sleep in the tomb until she appears again. Even her unreality is stronger than the reality of life.

How the Fates must laugh at this tangle! But I cannot laugh. It has shaken my soul to its depths. Jack, if you have any pity, believe that none deserves it more than I.

THORN.

7

Karnak, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

Do you believe the ancient Egyptians were right in their ideas of religion and the afterlife? I do. I not only believe it, but I swear by my soul that, in the main, their interpretation is true. You may doubt, but I have had incontestable proof. It is useless to try to influence you, I know. You will hold to the God of your fathers and say that my words are the ravings of a madman. Don't ignore the truth! Jack, as you value your immortal soul, see it before it is too late. I know it is impossible to make you believe; but I have seen the light and I want you to see it too. But you never will—until you have been through the fire as I have.

I have bought the tomb and the land about it. I shall not tell you the price I paid the government—you would be convinced of my insanity. You remember Youssef Tauphick in Cairo, who has studied the ancient methods of embalming? He will take charge of my body when I die and my mummy shall be placed in the tomb with Nitocris. All this is taken care of in a new will I have made.

I am restoring as much of the original furniture of the tomb as I can and replacing the rest. All modern science will be employed in sealing it, and it should be safe from vandals until the day of resurrection.

Each night I sleep in the tomb and the days between drag endlessly. Each night she comes to me.

The contrast between the hot days and the cold nights has combined with my run-down condition to give me a fever. The doctor gives me two months to live unless I come to the city where I can take care of myself. He supposes I want to live!

What would he say if he knew I wanted to die? You, I know, will understand. I pray each day for it to come and come quickly. Then we shall be together, not only when I can sleep, but every hour and every minute.

We are waiting. When my soul shall be freed, we shall begin our journey through the underworld, together, and together we shall stand in the judgment hall of Osiris.

And meantime our bodies will lie side by side, safe in the tomb until the day of resurrection, when our souls will enter them together and we shall be united in life at last.

Good-bye, old friend,

THORN.

A Fascinating Story

THE WHITE QUEEN OF THE COROLANS

By ARTHUR THATCHER

The author of the Teeheemen tales outdoes himself in this bizarre novelette. Adventures galore, hairbreadth escapes, and a wealth of vivid and startling incidents make this remarkable story one that will long be remembered.

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

On Sale At All News Stands June First

He Scoffed at the Signs in his Horoscope

An Arc of Direction

An Astrological Tale

By JUNIUS B. SMITH

Author of "The Man Who Dared to Know"

THE younger man cast the stub of his cigarette from the open window and laughed. "Your theories are absurd, my dear Elton. If a man could always tell when to sow and when to reap, his fortune would be assured."

"Exactly," Elton agreed, fingering the pages of a book on astrology, which he evidently had been perusing when the other came in. After a moment he continued: "Naturally you don't believe one may look into the future."

"If you want my candid opinion . . . I do not. I may say I will have *coffee and* for breakfast, but I am not certain of it . . . I may be dead when breakfast time comes." He rolled another cigarette and set it alight. "I may not even finish the smoke in my mouth," he added, as he tossed the still blazing match out of the window.

Elton viewed the act with a little frown upon his face. "I'm afraid, friend Hall, that to you fate will be fate indeed, for you act without due thinking. For instance, how do you know where that cigarette stub went, or the match that followed it? For all you know, it may have struck tinder and I may be seeking accommodations elsewhere tonight."

"Tut, tut! There's nothing outside but some vines running up the wall, as they do over at my place, and some flowers and grass on either side the cement walk. I saw all that the last time you showed me your horticultural skill."

"You assume there has been no change . . . you do not really know. And one who trusts in chance has his destiny fixed by the stars. Just when and where were you born?"

Hall took the cigarette from his lips as Elton reached for a sheet of paper on which to make the notation.

"You're really not serious, old dear? Surely you don't take any stock in that exploded thing! Let us talk about something worth while."

"We are doing just that. I am curious as to the date of your demise."

Hall shrugged his shoulders. "Poppycock! If I didn't know you as a successful business man I'd think something was wrong with your head. I don't know but that there is anyway. A doctor once told me that everybody was crazy on at least one subject. Nobody ever told me what subject I'm bugs on and I suppose no one knows his pet failing nor believes anyone who tells him. So you think *you* can tell when *I* am going to *die!* That's rich . . . I don't know myself."

"You will, if you give me the information I ask."

"By cracky! I believe you *believe* you can tell. I'll bet you a quart of pink lemonade against that one-lunged flivver of yours, that I outwear your dilapidated tires."

"Maybe so, maybe so . . . I can't tell when you are going to die if you don't tell me where and when you were born."

In the end, Hall gave the information asked.

"And now what?" asked the younger man. "Shall I wait while you diagnose my case, or shall I return at some later date?"

"Just as you like," Elton replied. "It involves considerable work, so perhaps you'd better call around in a week from now."

It was a month before Hall again visited his friend. When he did, it was with no intention of learning his fate as foretold by the stars, but rather upon another matter. Nor was the subject brought up by him, though what he said directly opened the question:

"I'm going to be married in September."

Elton considered the statement for a moment but said nothing.

"Sweetest girl you ever saw," Hall amplified.

Still no comment.

"You're to stand up with me, if you will. It was that which brought me here today."

"I am glad you came," Elton at last broke his silence. "I was about to set forth and find you. Your announcement does not come as a surprize to me, for such an attachment is shown in your horoscope for this time. But" (and he weighed his words carefully) "if you really want the girl, you had better marry her . . . immediately. Of course, she might object to being left a widow so soon. . ."

"Shall I call a doctor for you, Elton? You talk as if you're sick."

"I'm not sick and I don't need a doctor. But in all seriousness, friend Hall, you need a nurse or at least a bodyguard in the very near future, for according to my calculations, on the tenth of next month, unless you do something to prevent it, you will most assuredly be . . . *hanged.*"

Hall looked at Elton for a full half minute, then spoke: "You surely don't believe that bunk! If you are joshing, I think you have gone far enough."

"I was never more serious in my life. According to my calculated arcs of direction. . ."

"Arcs of . . . what?" Hall involuntarily exclaimed.

"Arcs of direction . . . planetary angulations we astrologers calculate to tell when a designated result will materialize."

"Oh, I see . . . First you tell what is going to happen to a fellow . . . and then . . . when. So I'm going to be hanged on the tenth of next month. Quick work! I haven't killed anybody yet . . . and they don't hang them that soon, even if I should go out and kill somebody between now and then."

"Oh, there are lots of ways you might get hanged. Some overenthusiastic citizens, for instance, might string you up to the nearest telegraph pole or convenient limb. You wouldn't be the first man who had suffered a vicarious death."

"Quit it, Elton . . . you're making my nerves jumpy." He moved toward the window and looked out.

"I'll miss you greatly," Elton replied. "Let me tell the girl all about it . . . maybe she'll marry you at once to take care of you. Get a bodyguard or do *something.* Believe me a fool, if you like, but don't take a chance. Fate has an unkind way of pulling mean little tricks."

"You gloomy old cuss . . . you've scared me out of a year's growth. You look as if you were attending my funeral already."

The tenth of the following month came and Hall had taken no precautionary measures. Every time he thought of what Elton told him, he felt sorry for Elton. His mind was undoubtedly slipping—pity, too! Genius and insanity were very close together.

He lay in bed and looked up at the ceiling and pondered about what his friend had told him. This was the day he was to be hanged. He never felt any farther from death than he did that very minute. Of course, he might walk out on the street and something unforeseen befall him. All in all, perhaps it were better to remain in his home all day. . . in bed, even . . . only that seemed plumb foolish. On second thought, he *would* remain indoors. There was no use taking chances, as Elton had pointed out. There was nothing he had to do, so he might as well do it at home as elsewhere. Of course Elton had wanted him to provide a bodyguard . . . some sort of a companion, who could cut him down, perhaps . . . but that was beside the question. What need did he have of a bodyguard? . . . the bodyguard might hang him. His mind began all sorts of queer gymnastics. He was nervous in spite of himself.

He crawled out of bed when the sun, shining through the open window, drove him to it. After a shower, he slowly dressed. Suddenly an idea hit him. "Elton's so cocksure I'm going to die today, I believe I'll 'phone him and tell him to come over. That's killing two birds with one stone. . . He'd make an excellent bodyguard . . . that is, if he isn't crazy . . . and we can play chess, which will while the hours away. Yep, I'll get him on the 'phone immediately."

And he did.

"Was just coming over anyway," Elton told him.

Hall made some toast and poached an egg. His appetite wasn't very keen. Living alone in a two-story house and doing his own cooking, when not eating at a cafeteria, was getting monotonous, to say the least. He was glad he was to be married in September. It would be different when he had a wife to take charge of the home which had been left him by his parents.

His frugal meal finished, he ran upstairs to get his chess-board and men. The sunlight was pouring through the window in added volume. It was too beautiful a day to be cooped up. But he'd forget about all that when he and Elton got to playing chess. He decided he might as well make his bed while waiting for Elton, and busied himself in that occupation.

Then he went to the open window and looked out. Elton should be coming any minute now. Speeding autos flashed to and fro. The honk of an occasional horn sounded warning. An old horse, pulling a still older express wagon, rattled past, the driver hunched on his seat. A bicycle or two added variety, and men, women and children sauntered, hurried or ran along the walks, according to what each was intent upon doing. Hall wondered if any of those down upon whom he was looking would turn aside long enough to hang him. His face lighted with rather an amused smile. He'd have to talk to the doctor about Elton . . . it wasn't good for a man to get such crazy notions into his head.

His eyes drifted to his immediate yard. A bird cooed and scolded its fledglings in the evergreen tree not a dozen feet away. He watched it feed its young. A humming-bird whizzed past his face, its invisible wings fanning the air with great rapidity. From flower to flower it darted on the creeping vines beside the house. He watched it lazily, fascinated by its beauty, its daintiness, the music of its flight. Was it possible that he, in the

midst of life, was on the threshold of death?

Into his revery broke the hum of a motor strangely familiar to his ears. It was Elton's car, he had no doubt. He strained his eyes to catch sight of it and confirm his guess.

Then he turned to go downstairs and let Elton in.

On the morning of the tenth, Elton became very uneasy. He was sincere in what he had told his friend Hall. He feared, however, that Hall would disregard the warning and come to disaster. Since, in most likelihood, Hall would not provide himself with a bodyguard, why not be that bodyguard himself? So Elton reasoned. It was precisely at the time when he made up his mind to attend Hall all that day, that Hall telephoned him.

He got his car from the garage and inspected the right front tire, concerning which Hall had been kidding him on more than one occasion. It was about ready to go out, but this was no time to change it. He could do that when he got to Hall's place, or later, or let it go until it *did* blow out.

He was just slowing as he drew close to Hall's residence, to make the turn into the driveway on the north of the house, when the tire went out with a loud bang.

He turned into the driveway on the rim, stopped and quickly changed tires. He might as well get it over with before going into the house, so he could wash up when he did go in.

The tire changed, he went to the front door and pushed the bell. No answer came. He knocked long and loudly. Still no answer. Worried at the silence, he started along the cement path that led to the rear around the south side of the house and paused to stand aghast at what he saw as he turned the corner.

As Hall turned with intention of leaving the open window to admit his friend, the latter's tire had exploded. Hall, whose nerves were jumpy as a result of his friend's dire foreboding, started, lost his balance and fell backward out of the window. He clutched at the vines held to the side of the wall by the metal netting, but they gave and tore away and let him continue to fall. And then one, more tenacious than the rest, held, but it wrapped its sinuous length around his neck. He fought and clutched at the wirelike fiber, but the noose slipped only tighter.

He was *almost* dead when Elton cut him down.

HURLED INTO THE INFINITE

A TWO-PART STORY

by J. Schlossel

Author of "Invaders From Outside"

"A MAN wants to speak to you on the 'phone, Ned," my sister sang out from the foot of the stairs.

"All right, sis, I'll be down in a minute," I answered as I gave my tie another tug.

"Ned," I heard my sister say as she began to mount the steps, "do hurry. The man on the other end seems terribly excited about something. I could hardly make out a word he was saying, except that he wants to speak to you at once."

I hurried down stairs, taking two and three steps at a time. My sister hovered expectantly near as I took the receiver in my hand.

"Hello!" I said. "Hello! Is there any one there?" Something spluttered in my right ear. "Did you wish to speak to me? This is Ned, Ned Spencer, speaking."

There was a rush and then a roar, as a flood of words, wholly unintelligible, was hurled over the wire pell-mell. Not a word could I understand. I was on the point of telling him that he had the wrong number; for it sounded like gibberish, and I thought that the person was speaking in some foreign tongue, when I recognized the voice.

"Whoa, there, Mr. Thomas!" I broke in as he paused an instant for breath. "Calm down, man, and tell me what it is all about, but for land's sake tell it slowly! Don't try to say it all in one mouthful. It just can't be done."

His excitement was evidently terrific, for it was a full minute or so before his voice sounded again in my ear. It was a little clearer, but it was tense, almost on the point of vibrating:

"Ned, I thought you'd never come to the 'phone. She is with you, Ned, isn't she?"

"Who?"

"Grace, of course. Who else?"

"No, Mr. Thomas. She is not here. I haven't seen her today. In fact I haven't even called her up all day, for she told me she would not be home."

"You knew that she would not be home today, Ned?" Mr. Thomas broke in. "Then you must know where she is, don't you?"

"Well, no, not exactly. Last night she told me that she intended to visit a girl friend today and stay over night. She must have told her mother of her plans. Didn't she tell you?"

"No, Ned. She didn't tell me, neither did she tell her mother. But

I am glad to know that she is only visiting a girl friend."

His voice was calmer and a little relieved, but there was still a doubtful note in it, as if he couldn't quite convince himself that all was well.

"There is no reason to worry, Mr. Thomas, I am sure," I said.

"I hope there isn't, Ned. I can hardly stop worrying until I am sure she hasn't come to any harm. She left early this morning to do some shopping and we haven't heard from her since. It is past 10 now, you know, and she has never been out so late before without our knowing where she was. Her mother is in hysterics. I'd better tell her what you told me about her visiting a friend. She has already had me call up the police stations, the hospitals, and the morgue to see if anyone answering to her description has met with an accident. But thank heaven, there wasn't!"

Impulsively I echoed it.

"Who was the girl friend that Grace planned to visit, Ned?" Mr. Thomas asked. "I will call her up and make sure that she is there."

"Let me see. It was Miss—Miss—it is on the tip of my tongue. I will recall it in a moment."

"Hurry, Ned. Do not keep me in suspense."

"It—it is Miss—I am sorry, Mr. Thomas, but I can't recall the girl's name at the moment. I wasn't paying much attention to the name. We were talking about something else when something that I said reminded her that she was going to see her friend. But it is not so very late yet. When two girls get together and talk they are likely to forget everything but what they happen to be talking about. Call me up in an hour or so and let me know if you hear from her. I think she will remember that she hasn't told you and will call you up, but if she hasn't, we will start calling up all of her girl friends and find out if she is with them. Good-bye."

"Was that Grace's father, Ned?" my sister asked.

"Yes. He thinks that Grace is lost or something happened to her. He thought that she was with me. I told him that I haven't seen her today. Grace told me last night that she was going to visit a girl friend and stay over night. I forgot the name of the girl, and so could not help Mr. Thomas to locate her."

"But I met Grace today, Ned."

"You did? Where? When?"

"A little before noon, downtown. I was hurrying home and could only stop for a moment. We chatted about nothing in particular for about a minute and then I bade her good-bye. As we were parting she told me to tell you to get tickets for tomorrow night's show, about the same row that you had last week."

"I got them last night on the way home."

"That doesn't sound as if there was anything out of the ordinary on her mind, Ned, does it?"

"I know that she is all right. It is her mother who is so easily excited over the least little thing. Grace thought, perhaps, that she had already told her parents what she intended to do and forgot to make sure."

GRACE THOMAS was my fiancée, and the date of the wedding was just two weeks off. We had known each other for about three years. I did not feel as if there was any reason for alarm just because she had not been home for a few hours. I knew that she was well able to take care of herself in any emergency.

After meeting my sister, she might have met her friend and gone shopping with her and then both might have gone to a show, intending to call her mother up afterward and tell her where she was going to spend the night.

I had intended to go out and see a chum, but I put off my intention so that I might be within reach of Mr. Thomas by telephone.

It was after midnight before Mr. Thomas called me up and told me that Grace wasn't home yet and that he hadn't heard from her. He next told me that he had called up all of her girl friends that he or her mother could remember, but not one really knew where Grace could be. I suggested a few others and waited impatiently until he had called them up. I still could not recall the name of the girl that Grace had intended to visit. The fear in his voice was contagious, and I felt it swiftly creeping over me.

One of the numbers that I had suggested did not answer. The other girls all said they hadn't seen Grace all day and they did not know where she could possibly be. Mr. Thomas then told me he was going to call up the police and have a search made for her.

It was after 2 before I finally crawled into bed. It was hours before I stilled the fears that I had caught from Mr. Thomas, and had the conviction firmly entrenched in my mind that all would surely turn out all right when I awoke in the morning.

When I did drop off to sleep I slept fitfully. I had a nightmarish dream in which I always came out second best in my struggles with a dozen murderers and varied kidnapers in defense of Grace. It was morning, I think, when I dropped into a heavy, dreamless sleep. I heard the alarm clock as if from a great distance. It was after 9 before I was sufficiently awake to remember what had happened the night before. I jumped out of bed and called up Mr. Thomas, and asked him if he had heard from Grace yet.

"No, Ned," he answered brokenly. "I am nearly crazy with worry. I haven't slept a wink during the whole night. Her mother was semi-delirious half of the night. She was calling for Grace until I called the doctor. He gave her something that quieted her and made her go to sleep. Come on over, lad, will you?" he ended beseechingly.

"I'll be over at once, Mr. Thomas," I promised.

I JUMPED into my clothes and caught a south-bound car. As the car crawled along, a nameless fear seeped through my mind. I tried to think of other things than the present. I even reviewed the last three years of my life. It was about three years ago that I first met Grace. I grinned as I recalled how I saw to it that I met her often after that. It didn't take so very long before we became great pals.

A little before I began seeking Grace out and making dates with her for nearly every night in the week she had been going out with some one by the name of Karl Hademan. I had never met him. From what I managed to gather from Grace I learned that he was a powerful personality, and was also a fanatic over something or other; what it was Grace could never draw out from him, though he had at one time let slip that he was one of the leaders in a powerful secret society.

Grace had not been averse to his attentions, for he was a figure to attract any girl. But he left the city and did not return during more than six months. By that time I had been going steadily with Grace for about three months.

Grace's father disliked him intensely after he returned, for Hademan seemed to consider himself a superior being. One day, when Mr. Thomas could stand it no longer, he deliberately picked a quarrel with him, and they almost came to blows. That was the last time that Hademan

ever came to their house and it was the last time that Grace ever saw him.

I LOOKED up suddenly on hearing the conductor call out a street that was past my destination. I jumped up and left the car at the next stop. I was just four blocks past my street. I hurried back.

Grace's father met me at the door. He seemed to have aged years since I saw him last. My hand gripped his in sympathy, while my eyes tried to assure him that all would surely come out right before the day had passed.

He told me how he had sat by the telephone most of the night in the hope that he would hear from Grace. He had been calling up the police station nearly every quarter of an hour.

After he had finished his recital I made him lie down on the couch. He was so tired that he was sound asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

Suddenly, as I tiptoed out of the room where I left him sleeping, I recalled the name of the girl friend that Grace had planned to visit. It was strange that I did not recall her before. The name was Murray, Elsie Murray.

I looked up the Murrays in the telephone book. There was a long list of them. Luckily I recalled her address. I got the right number at last. A thin, squeaky voice sounded in my ear. It was Miss Murray herself. I asked her about Grace and she answered that she hadn't seen her since the afternoon before the last.

THREE months swiftly glided into the past, and during all those long days there was no sign of Grace. It seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up. In those terrible three months of worry and fruitless search her father had aged at least twenty years. Grace had been the only surviving child out of a family of five. Her mother, who doted upon her, died within a week of her disappearance, as a result of the continuous worry and nervous strain.

The police, who had at first promised that they would find Grace within twenty-four hours, and then within a week, admitted at last that they could do nothing. There was absolutely nothing to go by; she had just vanished. And I learned that thousands disappear in precisely the same manner and are never heard of afterward.

Mr. Thomas had told the police that if they would question Karl Hademan they might be able to find her. They searched for Mr. Hademan and learned that he had left his rooms about a year and a half before. He, also, had disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him. There was nothing to connect one with the other, but Mr. Thomas asserted that Karl Hademan was responsible for Grace's disappearance.

I offered rewards. I spent every penny that I possessed. I employed private detectives, and their search proved as fruitless as that of the police. All that they found out was that Hademan had come from somewhere out in the Middle West. They couldn't find out just where. They followed a thousand clues. But what good did it do me that they should follow clues, each of which led to nowhere?

I, too, searched, day in and day out, all to no avail. Mine was an intense, dogged determination to find her if I had to search the world over. I followed, not one, but ten thousand clues. Some of the leads that I followed led for hundreds of miles. When my funds gave out I traveled how I could, begging rides on the highways, on the rods, any way. The last clue that I followed carried me half-way across the continent. It seemed that this time I was on the

right track. Something inside of me seemed to tell me that I would find her before I returned to the city.

The description of the girl that I was following tallied exactly with that of Grace as she had been last dressed. And there was a man with her, his description (I gritted my teeth at the time it was told to me) was that of an intimate friend, the one that I was going to see on the day that Grace disappeared. And before I left the city I had prepared myself with an ugly-looking and powerful automatic. But it had proved a wild-goose chase, also.

From this last search I was returning on foot. I was absolutely penniless, and so dulled by misery that I did not know where I was going or what I was doing. Every morning after I got up from where I had thrown myself—shed, haystack, or even the ditch by the roadside when nothing better offered—I would face the east and begin another day of plodding along an endless road.

A strange apathy settled upon me as I trudged back. Something in me still whispered that I should keep up the search, but I was in a state that resembled stupor. I was weary of searching, searching, always searching. I dimly realized that I had reached the end of my tether. Like an automaton I stumbled along, hopeless, deadened, no longer caring. The wind was bitterly cold, and I shivered spasmodically as I walked down the deserted country road. My brain seemed befogged, but the cold was penetrating past the haze.

Sharp pains were gnawing at my stomach. I hadn't eaten a full meal for many a day. I was so hungry that I would have eaten anything—anything. I had to eat soon if I expected to keep going, but there was no farmhouse in sight.

The biting cold, penetrating farther and farther into my stupefied brain, was clearing it, was a tonic. Hoping to find some shelter, I began to take more interest in my surroundings. I hadn't passed a house for miles and miles, and as far as I could see on the road ahead of me there was none, but on my right, just visible over the top of some trees that screened it from the road, there was the roof of some large barnlike structure.

I realized that a storm was approaching very swiftly, and in my weakened condition I dared not face it. I tottered nearer to the large barnlike structure that had been just visible over the treetops.

The house was square, and very large. As I drew nearer I saw that all of the windows were boarded up. The place appeared to have been deserted for a very long time.

I came to a driveway, overgrown with weeds. It led to a porch in the front of the house. I climbed it. The porch was covered with dirt and dust from many months. I tried the door. It was locked. The grounds, exceedingly large, seemed as if they had never known the feel of the plow. The whole place hinted at death and desolation.

A strong wind began to blow as I trudged wearily around that house, seeking for an unboarded window. From far off there came dull blots of thunder. The wind began to moan. A cold drop of rain splashed upon my hand and another splattered upon the toe of the dusty, broken oxford on my right foot. A few more drops were hurled against my face by a sudden gust.

The wind was gaining violence every moment. That giant of a tree on the little knoll about half a mile from the house seemed to bend very low, as if in obeisance to the power of the wind. I watched it. It bent lower. It straightened suddenly in a lull and then I saw it bend until the branches touched the

ground. It broke a little above the ground, and a moment later there was a belated roar of snapping wood and a crash as the tree lay flat upon the ground. A gust of wind violently knocked me against the side of the house. Then the rain began coming down in a deluge.

I pried three boards from a cellar window, smashed the glass with my foot and crawled in.

The inside of the cellar was as dark as pitch. In my pocket I had a powerful flashlight; the batteries were almost new, having been used only once or twice, and a short, ugly automatic reposed in a holster under my left arm-pit. Both were relics of those few short weeks in which I had sought Grace with such earnestness and deadly intent.

Flashing my light around, I saw with some surprize that the cellar was well stocked with roots and vegetables. Along the walls there were shelves bearing hundreds of jars, containing fruits, berries, and more vegetables. I was astonished, for the house, from outside, seemed as if deserted for years.

Being ravenously hungry, I ate my fill of vegetables and drank the juice of a jar of pears. I next opened up a jar of tomatoes and emptied it with a few gulps. When I satisfied my inner self I picked up my flashlight and looked around. I came to some steps that led upstairs. I looked under the stairs and saw a bunch of sacks. I was very tired and the sacks looked warm and comfortable. I decided to investigate the upstairs after a while. I crawled in between the sacks and in a very little while I was sound asleep.

How long I slept, I do not know. Something startled me into wakefulness. I opened my eyes, but did not move. There was nothing visible of my face from under the sacks but my nose and eyes. I had heard something—I could not say what. My heart beat like a trip-hammer as I listened, but I could hear nothing for a minute. Then there came again the sound that had startled me out of my sleep. It was a long, muffled whir. It came again, once, twice, a long pause, and then still again.

I heard a step on the floor above me. I shivered, though I did not know why. The cellar door above me opened and someone came down with a lantern. I drew my face under the sacks and waited. The person, whoever he was, moved across the cellar to the opposite wall. I heard a metallic sound and then a jar. The light disappeared from the cellar.

I peeked out to make sure. The cellar was steeped in darkness, was even blacker than pitch, if that was possible. I pinched myself to see if I were dreaming. The thought of a person with a lantern going through a wall smacked strongly of ghosts. I lay there amongst the warm sacks loath to get up, ghosts or no ghosts.

There came a sudden metallic sound again and the yellow light of a lantern came through an ever-widening crack. There was a secret door in the cellar. I gazed through a tiny hole in the sack that covered my eyes. The man with the lantern led the way up the stair, and behind him came two others. They walked slowly up the cellar steps and shut the door behind them.

I waited. After a few minutes I heard a soft murmur of voices. I got up and opened another jar of pears. I knew exactly where they were. I was feeling much better after that comfortable sleep. My impulse was to take with me a few jars of fruit and hastily leave the cellar the way that I entered, but an adventurous impulse (the reaction of a full stomach, maybe) made me crawl up the cellar steps to investigate.

I removed my shoes to avoid unnecessary noise. I reached the head of the steps and slowly turned the knob of the door. As I opened it a fraction of an inch I heard a murmur of voices come from the front part of the house. I opened the door wider. The hinges were well oiled, and the door made no sound. Wider I opened. I stuck my head through and looked around. There was no one in sight.

I stepped in and closed the door behind me. My knees were knocking against each other. I was fast becoming afraid, and wishing I had heeded my first impulse and left the house. I was about to turn my back and return to the cellar door when I heard a woman's frightened scream. The scream was choked, cut off in the middle.

I took a full step forward. That scream made me think of Grace.

From the far end of the hall, whence the sceram had come, a crack of dim light showed. I tiptoed to the end of the hall. A heavy black velvet curtain hid the room beyond. I heard someone speaking, and the shuffling of many feet. The speaker seemed to be addressing a large audience.

I pushed the curtain aside a little more and peered into the room. The sight that met my gaze made me wonder again if I was not, after all, dreaming. I had to pinch myself again to see if I was really awake.

The room was very large. The whole front of the house, I saw, both the upper and the lower floor, had been converted into that one huge chamber. Long, heavy black curtains hung from the second floor ceiling to the floor of the room on the ground story. The ceiling had been painted a dull black. A thick black carpet covered the floor. All the furnishings were either painted a dull black or covered with black velvet.

A dim sort of daylight oozed into the room from some undiscoverable source. The light cast no shadows. It was dull, yet everything stood out clearly, when once the eyes became accustomed to it.

In the chamber there were seven rows of heavy, comfortable chairs. Each row contained seven chairs, making forty-nine in all. A figure dressed in somber black reclined comfortably in each chair. In front of the seven rows stood a man, also dressed in somber black, addressing them with much fervor. The forty-nine were listening as if under a spell.

He stood beside an oblong block of dull yellow metal, about six feet long, three feet wide, and four feet high. It had the appearance of an altar. A human form, covered to the chin, lay on the metal blocks in a deathlike rigidness. Staring harder at what lay upon the stone, my eyes almost popping out of my head, I saw that it was a woman, and the woman was Grace!

I TRIED desperately to leap forward, to cry out, but some force held me numb. I was powerless to move. I seemed chained to where I stood by a force greater than my own will. "Grace! Grace!" I tried to cry out, but no sound broke from my lips.

There came to my mind a flock of questions: "What was she doing here? Was this seemingly abandoned house a secret temple of some fiendish cult of devil-worshipers? Why was she lying there so rigidly? Was she dead? Was I to find the one that I loved only to lose her? What uncanny power held me chained where I stood? What was I to do?"

I gazed intently into the faces of those who occupied the chairs. My fears steadily mounted as my eyes crept down each row in turn. Even though I realized for a certainty that they were not yet aware of my presence, I shivered with dread as I read in their faces their utter callousness to human suffering.

The features of each were haughtily cold. The men seemed aloof from the emotions that leap like fire in the breasts of other men. Their tightly compressed lips told plainly that love and its kindred emotions were strangers to them. They were not exactly cruel, at least not with the cruelty of wishing to give pain for pain's sake, but their coldness was heartless, like that of a surgeon working over some living animal at the dissecting table.

They were of all races under the sun. Color or creed did not seem to weigh in their estimation. Nearly all of the faces were long and narrow up to the eyes; above the eyes the head bulged sharply out, while the forehead in each case towered straight up. Although they were of all races, yet they seemed alike in physical characteristics. Mentally, they were giants; their tremendous power of intellect shone from their eyes in streams of zero-cold light.

The one near the altar, or oblong block of yellow metal, abruptly ceased speaking and moved back to a chair behind the altar. He was the youngest. For a few minutes a deep silence reigned. Then one uttered a word to a neighbor; another asked a question of one in the row in front of him; and one by one they began to speak to each other, until they were all speaking at once. Their voices rose higher and higher.

An elderly man with a snow-white beard stood up and snapped out a few words. They all ceased speaking and turned their glowing eyes upon him. With a marked foreign accent he addressed them slowly in English. I dimly grasped the meaning of what he was saying.

"FELLOW members of the supreme council of the Society of Man," he began, "you all know that this earth, but an infinitesimal speck in the boundless universe, will soon be too small to hold the hordes of man in comfort. Man is increasing everywhere with astounding rapidity. Hitherto it was the custom of man, on finding that his country was overcrowded, to emigrate to the colonies of his country or to some foreign land that was sparsely populated, a wilder, more virgin land, and grow up with it; but that will soon be impossible, for each land is fast becoming overcrowded and immigration will soon be forbidden.

"It has even been predicted that man will soon live in subterranean cities. Man will have to take his cities off the earth's surface down into the bowels of the earth, for each square inch will soon be needed for the production of food stuffs. Man has already started in that general direction by living in abandoned coal mines. He will burrow deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth before many years have passed. But even down there he can only go so far; the earth grows hotter the farther he descends below a certain level.

"One of the chief reasons for this state of affairs is the rapid advancement in the field of medicine. Births have long since left deaths behind, and plagues that so quickly thinned the ranks of mankind are not so common now, nor so deadly as they were up to the period that immediately followed the great World War. And owing to the rapid mode of transportation and the humane instinct that we now feel toward our fellow men when they are in trouble, famine is almost unknown. In this great war that man is waging against his arch enemy, premature death, we, too, have aided, but secretly, and individually, not openly as the members of our secret society.

"One of the outstanding laws of our society is: 'The use of this glorious society for the gratification of personal desires and ambitions is pun-

ishable by death.' We have borrowed the mode of death, hara-kiri, from the Japanese, and that death must be self-inflicted. It was early recognized that this stern code was absolutely necessary; for man, individually, is weak when confronted by the temptation of power.

"And each member of this secret world-wide society, from the lowest ranks up to us, the all-highest, is solemnly pledged to give his life if need be for the principles on which our society is founded. Anyone who betrays the secrets of this society, or the existence of the society itself, for that matter, is punished by hara-kiri, and the one to whom the secret has been divulged is treated likewise.

"If some great cataclysm of nature should occur, the human species might be wiped out completely. Man, living only on one planet, or world, has all of his eggs, so to speak, in one basket. Realizing this, the great founders of the glorious Society of Man have made the primary principle of this society to devise ways and means by which the terrible chasms that separate world from world might be crossed. Our second principle is to propagate the human species in other worlds, so as to guard against total extinction of the race of man.

"There have been members of our society, unknown martyrs, who have secretly met with some measure of success in experimenting mechanically with the first problem. But in trying out the feasibility of their mechanical devices, member after member of our glorious society has gone down to terrible death. In the countless secret attempts that our members have undertaken, an isolated one here and there has won through. But the reports that they have managed to send back in code have been extremely gloomy, for only after undescribable difficulties have they reached the outlying major planets. It took years to make a trip. They found out that nowhere in the solar system outside of the earth was there even the slightest possibility for the human species to exist. The cold was found to be so intense that it could freeze man solid, or the heat was so terrific that it would burn him to a crisp. Other forms of life existed there, to be sure, but what we call blood heat here on earth was either above boiling point or below zero on the other planets.

"So our only hope lies in the possibility of finding a means of going far beyond the limits of the solar system, out into the boundless realms of space, out to the other worlds that circle the countless myriads of stars that compose the Milky Way. But mechanically that has been found to be impossible, for the nearest star is twenty-five trillion miles away.

"And so tonight we, the fifty members that compose the supreme council of the Society of Man, have been called together from the four corners of Earth to try an entirely different method. It is the almost unknown power that the mind has over matter. We have never plumbed the depths of which the brain is capable. It seems strange to me now, looking back over the many experiments that the Society of Man has conducted in an effort to find how man can go to the other worlds in infinite space, that the unlimited power of the brain—mind—will—has not been given a trial.

"In my experiments I have found out that the power of the will, when once the simple rules are known, is well-nigh beyond the power of calculation. My experiments were conducted with the able assistance of No. 1, the oldest member of the supreme council, and No. 50, the youngest member. No. 50, the youngest, and therefore the most daring member of the supreme council, has bravely volunteered to go forth with the maid. He is willing to give his life, if need

be, as becomes a member of our exalted society.

"I feel certain that the possibility of using the powers of the mind to bridge the outer spaces has passed beyond the stage of mere theories. And so, members of the supreme council, with your able assistance, I will put it now to actual test.

"Realizing that we are dealing with forces of unlimited power that might destroy us as well as aid us, let me say that we are only at the threshold of this new force, and that it will only unfold itself as we continue to delve deeper into it. But if it proves a fiasco, fellow members, I wish that you would remember it was not personal ambition nor the wish for glory that drove me forth, but a deep, earnest desire to try to solve the secret. I would not undertake to attempt it even now if it were not for No. 50, who has became extremely restless and impatient since he brought back the maid with him on the day that he went to the city to search for a suitable subject. He has kept urging me to try, and at last I have consented.

"The instructions are very simple. It is their very simplicity that makes it all the more surprizing that we have not used this method long before. And yet, when I come to think of it, are not all the fundamental laws of nature simple? Civilized man alone is complex.

"All of my experiments with the power of the mind were centered around auto-suggestion and self-induced hypnotism. It was during one of my last experiments that I accidentally stumbled upon the wonderful, yet simple, laws which I will try to expound to you.

"But first, to lend due solemnity to the occasion and to the heroic sacrifice of No. 50, I will ask him to clamber on to the top of our sacred altar, the altar beside which each new recruit swears the vows of lifelong fidelity to the society and to the principles on which it is founded, and hold the unconscious form of the maid who has just collapsed on awaking from her hypnotic sleep. Why he chose her, merely an intelligent inferior, when he could have chosen his equal both in intelligence and in standing in the Society of Man, is more than I can say.

"The power of the mind, or will, is doubled every time that another will, also in the state of self-induced hypnotism, wills the same thing. But each of us must will it, not all together, but in rotation, one will following the other before it at the proper instant. Here in this room there are forty-nine members of the supreme council, not counting No. 50 and the maid.

"Take, for instance, the numeral 1: if it is doubled it becomes 2; if 2 is doubled it becomes 4; if 4 is doubled it becomes 8, and so on and on until it has been doubled forty-nine times. That is the secret of its tremendous power, the possibility of doubling its initial force every time another is added to it; for by the time that it has been doubled forty-nine times it will have climbed to the stupendous number of 281,474,976,410,656, or more than two hundred and eighty trillion!

"In other words, let us suppose that No. 1 were to induce himself into the state of hypnotism, and will with all the power of his being that those on the altar be sent to another world; and No. 2, after inducing hypnotism, also willed that those on the altar be sent out; and No. 3, in rotation, repeated it. The will power of No. 1 would pervade or mingle with that of No. 2 and double it, and the doubled will power of No. 2 would pervade No. 3 and double it, and on and on until when the fast-growing will reached No. 49, it would have more than two hundred and eighty trillion times the will power of one single individual.

It becomes a mighty power, a power to reckon with! Nothing is impossible with such a power.

"No. 1, if you are ready, we will start. Will with all the power of your mind—will that those on the altar be sent out into the infinite to another habitable world. Do not let up under any circumstances for a single instant. It may take a minute, it may take hours, even days; but remember, do not let up for even the barest fraction of an instant. That is a command from the supreme council through me, acting head of the Society of Man for this experiment.

"No. 1, yours will be the hardest part; for after you it will become increasingly easy for the others. Again I order that you should let nothing distract you. Your strength of mind will enter No. 2 and double his, and so No. 2 will naturally take only half the length of time that you take.

"Every member of the Supreme Council ready? No. 1, begin!"

GAZING into the room through a narrow slit where the heavy black curtain joined the jamb of the doorway, I saw the form of No. 1 grow rigid, and remain rigid for at least two hours. The other members of the supreme council, as they styled themselves, watched, waiting for No. 1 to relax, a sign that he had succeeded in inducing self-hypnotism. The instant that he relaxed, No. 2 stiffened. An hour or so later No. 2 relaxed and No. 3 stiffened. By the time that it reached No. 18 they were snapping erect and relaxing in less time than it took the eye to follow them. Hardly a second passed from the instant that No. 18 snapped erect to when No. 49 relaxed.

I felt the power that had held me chained fall from me as they stiffened and relaxed one by one. I was able to move my arms and legs at last. I felt my automatic still in my right hand, and knew that my pockets were full of cartridges. I pushed the automatic back into its holster under my armpit, for I did not need it. Pushing the heavy black curtain aside, I leapt into the room.

My feet sank to the ankles in the fluffy black covering that carpeted the entire floor of the chamber. It was like going through some thick obstructing medium. Slowly I made my way toward the altar on which No. 50 was standing supporting the unconscious form of Grace with one arm around her waist.

My eyes must have blazed with the fury of a madman at No. 50, who stood so unconcerned on the top of the yellow metal altar of the Society of Man. From what I had heard, I knew he was the cause of all my suffering. He had chosen her for their strange and terrible experiment. My feet just couldn't carry me swiftly enough toward the altar. I ached to lay my hands upon him. I wished to tear him apart, limb from limb.

No one made any move to stop me. They sat relaxed in their chairs as if in a sleep so profound that they could not possibly be awakened by any ordinary means.

The features of No. 50 were dreamy, as if he were deeply within the power that the forty-nine members of the supreme council were producing. Around the bodies of both of those on the altar there was a strange, indescribable mistiness that was thickening each instant.

Would I never reach the altar? I was panting heavily. The forty-nine members of the supreme council of the Society of Man hardly looked human. They seemed to be superhuman beings who were watching with indifference my race for the one that I held dearest in the world. Over me there came an impulse to draw out my automatic and destroy as many of those inhuman creatures as I could

before they destroyed me with their terrible will power. But I didn't heed that impulse. It would take time. My first thought was to save Grace.

At last I reached the side of the altar. My breath was coming in jerks. I could hardly climb up. Though the altar was only four feet high, yet I had to attempt twice before I was on top. I pulled myself erect by gripping the black robe of No. 50. I was on my feet. My breath was coming easier. I turned and faced No. 50, and with all the power I could summon I shot out my fist at his unprotected chin. I tried to condense all my fury into that blow. The thud of my fist landing was music to my ears. No. 50, who had seemed only semi-conscious before I struck, toppled off the altar. I clutched instinctively at Grace as he pulled her down with him, and I drew her to me hungrily.

"Grace! Grace!" I whispered intensely.

She did not move. She lay like one dead in my arms.

"Grace, darling, wake up!" I cried. "It is I—Ned!"

The corners of her mouth twitched, her eyelids fluttered as if she were awaking from a deep sleep. Suddenly her eyes opened wide, and terror rimmed them. She shuddered spasmodically. Her eyes closed, and I felt her limp in my arms again.

"Grace!" I cried.

Her eyes opened wide in amazement. She recognized my voice. She knew me through the grime, through the growth of beard, through everything.

"Oh, Ned!" she said simply; "I thought you'd never come!"

I felt a hand clutch at my ankle. Looking down I saw the face of No. 50, red with hate. With my other foot I kicked him. He let go of my foot and sank to the floor again.

The mistiness about Grace was thickening fast. I saw that it was enveloping me, also. Even while I clung to Grace she seemed suddenly to become unreal, phantomlike. I clutched harder at her. My arms seemed to envelop nothing but air. She was no longer within my arms! I caught a fleeting glimpse of her above me. She was fading and floating upward, disappearing in the blackness above.

A thick haze was enveloping me. I seemed to be within the grip of the power that had sent Grace away. My mind was clear, but I seemed to be unreal.

Another grip on both my ankles brought me back to myself. Looking down through the haze that was all about me, I saw the leering face of No. 50 stare back up at me.

He pulled me from the altar. I fell directly on top of him, my arms working like pistons. He let go of my ankles and started pummeling me. We rolled over and over on the thick, fluffy stuff that covered the floor, making no sound except the wheeze of our labored breathing and the thuds of our blows. Neither of us spoke a word. Our one desire was to beat the other into unconsciousness so that the victor might climb the altar and be sent out with Grace.

No. 50 managed to free himself from my grip by delivering a blow that momentarily stunned me. He leapt toward the altar and climbed up. I rose to my feet and was after him in an instant. He saw me coming and aimed a kick at my forehead. I ducked and caught his foot. He came down, striking his head against the hard surface of the altar. I pulled him off. He was limp.

I tried to climb the altar but found that my strength was hardly equal to the task. I rested against the side of the altar until my strength returned.

I tried again and pulled myself on to its hard, flat surface.

No. 50 sat up. He saw me on the altar and let out a bellow. He was after me at once. He staggered to the side of the altar and tried to climb up. I pushed him off.

Again he attempted to climb up. I pushed his hands away. He gripped my hands and pulled me off. We started at it again. He struck me on the forehead with his fist. He had a ring on one of his fingers and it broke through the skin. Blood started to trickle down into my eyes, blinding me. We drew apart. I wiped the blood from my eyes and saw that No. 50 was running away. I smiled grimly as I made my way to the altar yet again. I leaned against it. I heard a noise from the direction in which No. 50 had disappeared from the room. I looked around and saw him coming toward me on the run. He had caught up an ax, a fire-ax with one end pointed.

He swung the ax in a wide circle as he drew near me. I dodged it weakly. Again he swung, but I flung myself within the sweep of the ax and held on to it desperately. He tugged at it, but I hung on. It would be death to let go.

Somehow we both managed to clamber upon the altar, both clinging to the ax. The arm with which I gripped the ax I managed to get around his neck so that he couldn't get his head free unless he let go of the ax. With my other hand I struck him as fast and as hard as I could. He in turn was kicking and biting, but I didn't mind. I believe that I would have smashed his face into pulp except that I felt myself dissolving as Grace had done.

It seemed as if I were within the grip of a terrible whirlpool of power that was whirling me around and around. I hung on to No. 50; for he was revolving and dissolving with me. I seemed like a straw in the grip of a tornado. The world suddenly seemed to slip away from me. The stars shone out brilliantly all about me.

I was still clinging to No. 50 and the fire-ax. He was still struggling. We whirled over and over, punching, biting, kicking, two savage wisps of humanity being hurled along inconceivably faster than a ray of light. Mighty suns brushed by us as we whirled along, still in each other's grip.

Directly in front of us there was a small yellow sun with a number of smaller dark bodies circling it. We were hurtling toward one of those small bodies at a frightful speed. It grew larger and larger as we drew nearer to it. It became a huge ball that shut off a quarter of the heaven in front of us. Still it continued to grow. It changed from a convex sphere to a concave bowl.

With a sudden, quick movement No. 50 drew away from me. But I still clung to the ax. I watched him dwindle away from me like a wisp of extremely thin white smoke.

Once more I seemed to be gripped within a whirlpool of tremendous power. I felt myself whirled around and around with dizzying speed. The dark body beneath me lost all semblance of reality. Nothing was real except the ax that I clung to. I lost consciousness.

GRADUALLY my senses flooded back to me. I felt sick, uncomfortably hot. Without daring to open my eyes I felt the surface on which I was lying. My hand touched warm, dry sand, such as is to be found on nearly every beach. Thus reassured, I opened my eyes, but closed them again at once, for I had stared into the blinding glare of a brilliant sun.

I seemed to be lying at full length on warm sand or earth. I heard the murmur of waters lapping the beach. Insects crawled over me.

Something felt like a piece of jagged rock against my back. I had been lying on the ax. I rolled over on my side and opened my eyes for the second time. I saw that I was, as I had already guessed, sprawled out on a sandy beach. I closed my eyes again, for the light was blinding. I wasn't used to it yet.

I sat up and opened my eyes a tiny bit. Huge, fronded trees grew near me. There was a solid wall of them a little way back. Snakelike creepers trailed down to the water's edge. Small, mushroomlike growths grew everywhere. The creepers writhed and twisted as if suffering from the heat that beat down steadily upon them.

I looked up and saw small creatures darting through the air. They were of all colors, and no larger than my hand. They resembled birds in the fact that they flew and had wings, but they were entirely featherless and had four wings instead of two. On the beach, hopping between the mushroomlike plants and snakelike creepers, were myriads of insects. Those creatures on wing were gobbling them up as fast as they could swallow.

Everything seemed strange. I thought of No. 50 and hastily turned my head to see if he was near, but there was no sign of him on the part of the beach upon which I was gazing. I felt the holster strapped under my armpit. It had my automatic safely within its keeping. I was glad, for it gave me a feeling of wonderful security.

I pressed the palm of my hand upon the warm sand of the beach to help me rise to my feet, and my body left the surface of the sand. The arm that I pressed down to help me stand up was supporting my entire weight!

I stood up. There was a curious lightness of my body. The surface of the beach seemed highly resilient, like rubber. I took a step forward and shot up into the air about four feet. I bounced up and down once or twice and then came to rest.

Standing still, not daring to move, I took stock of myself. I saw that my tattered blue serge suit still clung to my frame. I moved my arm up to touch my face and felt that it was still raw from the many blows that I had received from No. 50. The movement of my arm made me sway upon my feet. I seemed real, but everything else about me was nightmarish. I felt fear gaining ascendancy over me. I trembled violently.

Looking down upon the ground I saw one of the snakelike creepers touch my foot. I moved it away. The creeper moved after it. I stepped upon one of the mushroomlike growths and it exploded like a bag full of air, but there came no sound from it. The winged creatures were still darting here and there quite unconcerned. Everything seemed peaceful and quiet.

One of those small winged creatures darted down and picked up some insect at my very feet, paying no attention to me. Another of those four-winged birds darted down upon the snakelike creeper, pecked it, and was gone. They paid no more attention to me than if I were a rock. The snakelike creeper touched my foot again. I stepped upon it and a dull yellow fluid with a sickly smell came from it. I drew away, for it seemed poisonous. My eyes darted to the ax that lay upon the beach and I determined to get it and never let it go. It was a weapon that would give me confidence.

I sensed a sudden stillness. I looked around and saw all of those small winged creatures darting to the ground and not rising. They were crawling under bits of stone and vegetation. The air was empty in a minute. Though there was no sound, I instinctively felt the approach of some danger that those winged creatures, familiar with the different

life on this world, had sensed. Everything was deathly still. I moved gingerly toward the ax and picked it up.

A faint whir sounded directly over my head. Looking up with a start, I saw a huge creature hurtling down toward me. It looked like a reptile with two pairs of wings. It was cleaving the air like an arrow. The whir was becoming louder. The creature was enormous. Gripping the ax desperately, I prepared to strike when it came near.

It seemed to grow larger as it dropped. Its mouth alone was large enough to gobble me up in one mouthful. I realized that I could do nothing with my ax, but still I hung on to it, for I was determined to sell my life dearly. Its mouth was wide open and it was dropping down at me with the speed of a shot.

Suddenly there broke upon the still air a wild, unearthly cry. Everything grew still at that sound. The huge winged creature that was dropping down upon me wheeled about with a frightened squawk and darted up faster than it had dropped. It disappeared from sight in an instant. Again there broke upon the still air a wild, unearthly cry, but nearer!

I felt the skin on my forehead contract, my hair stand on end. My breath came in labored jerks. My knees knocked against each other. My impulse was to run. But whither?

From far across the water there came an answering cry. The air grew tense after that. The things that had made those cries seemed to be calling to each other. What were they?

I tried to take a step, to run, but instead of that I turned two somersaults and landed lightly upon my back. I stood up again and took another step. This time I went up in the air about four feet, but I came down upon my feet. The slightest movement of my feet was enough to send me up in the air. I took another step, moving very carefully, like a tightrope walker, and came down again safely upon my feet. I had learned how to keep my balance.

There came a snapping and crashing in the solid wall of fronded trees, but a little way from where I stood. The ground under me seemed to quiver with the weight of this new terror. The trees parted and the head of a creature, the like of which I did not dream could possibly exist, broke through and headed straight for my direction. It did not run, it hopped. It had but one leg and a long tail. It threw itself forward about twenty yards at every hop. It was larger than an express train. It had a large, ferocious head on a long, flexible neck.

From the opposite side of the water there came another wild, unearthly cry. This new terror stopped short and gave voice to a similar cry. The blood in my veins seemed to curdle. I was an alien on a strange, terrible world. Everything that I laid my eyes upon was unfamiliar, outlandish.

The creature was still coming toward me. It was so near that I could smell its foul breath.

Desperately I tried to move my fear-frozen legs. When the monster was almost on top of me I lurched aside, and rolled over and over. Its one leg crashed down about a yard from where I lay.

The creature did not pause to follow me. Doubtless it had not even seen me. It hopped straight for the water's edge, and plunged in. It hopped in until the water broke over its body, then, submerged, it continued its way. I could follow its course by the foam and bubbles on the water's surface.

From the direction beyond that terrible creature there came still another cry. The one that had passed me was answering the call of the other

of its own kind. From behind me there broke out a torrent of lesser cries and screams. Creatures of every kind and size felt the removal of the menace that had disappeared into the water.

SLOWLY I collected my wits. I thought of Grace. I dimly realized that this must be the world to which the supreme council of the Society of Man had willed to send those on the altar, Grace and No. 50. I, being also on the altar, had been sent along with them. Grace had preceded me by only a few minutes, so she must be somewhere near.

With a chill of fear I thought of her safety. The dangers of this world were many and terrible. I must search for her at once. Her danger was even greater than it had ever been on earth. Her need of me might be dire. Perhaps she was somewhere along the shore and calling for me at this very instant.

I felt for my automatic under my armpit again and was glad that it was still safely there. I picked up the ax and started forward. I stopped, for I did not know which way to go. I determined to leave it to chance. I searched through my pockets for something to toss up. My hand touched a box that contained forty cartridges or more. I even had my flashlight in an inside pocket of my tightly buttoned vest. I picked up a flat stone, spit upon one side and threw it into the air. It went high up, almost disappearing from my sight. I watched it as it dropped again. If it came down with the wet side on top I would turn to the right; if it came down with the dry side on top I would turn to the left. It came down with the dry side uppermost.

I nearly turned completely over at my first step. I found out that if I half jumped I could keep on my feet more easily. I jumped forward about twenty or thirty feet. The world to which the supreme council had sent me must have been very small. Gravitation was not as strong as on earth, but my muscles were. I would have to learn how to walk all over again.

It did not take me long to learn to keep my balance. I ran down the beach, practising how to keep erect. Each step carried me more than twenty feet forward. I could leap up over six times my own height.

After I was sure of my ability to move on this strange world I picked up the ax and turned to the left. I moved parallel with the impenetrable wall of frondlike trees. It was dark amongst those trees, and I felt many eyes upon me as I moved ahead.

My speed was great. I jumped over nearly every obstruction in my way. I became confident of my ability. I cleared a thirty-foot tree with ease. The confidence in the superiority of man came back to me. I thought that I should be satisfied if I could only find Grace. I would be content to stay on this world for the rest of my life with her.

I WAS moving along with great kangaroo bounds, searching the shore for the black robe that Grace had worn just before she faded from my arms. I had been going for about twenty minutes when my farther progress along the beach was barred by a thick, bushlike growth that reached from the dank, dark tangle of trees and snaky creepers to the water's edge. Leaping straight up in the air, for about twenty feet, I saw that the growths covered about five hundred feet of the beach. The bushlike plants that barred my progress were covered with large, rubbery-looking leaves of a sickly purplish color. They looked poisonous, and I did not feel like forcing my way through.

As I feared to go through the forest with its thousand and one unknown terrors, I decided to wade through the shallow water along the shore of the

beach. The water looked cool and inviting. I was both hot and thirsty.

I bent down and took a mouthful. It tasted a little salty, and it was also warm. I spit that mouthful out. I waded in until the water passed my knees. I bent down again and tasted the water. It was still a little salty, but it was much cooler.

I passed the bushlike growths and was headed back for the shore when the water swirled at my feet. Feeling a rather sharp pain in my left foot, I drew it instantly out of the water, and a small fish, seemingly all mouth, and about an inch and a half long, dropped from my foot. Where it had hung on, the blood was slowly oozing out. I leapt completely out of the shallow water when my right foot, still submerged, received a dozen sharp nips all at once. When I came down into the water again both my feet were instantly attacked by those bloodthirsty little devils. I leapt toward the shore as fast as I could, and the savage little fishes followed me on to the very beach in an effort to get another few bites out of my legs.

I made a vow that the next time anything blocked my way I would circle it by land, through the forest itself if need be.

On and on I traveled along the shore in great leaps. I came to a solid wall of green rock, smooth and unbroken, that went up to a dizzying height. I had to enter the forest after all. I forced my way into it. I had to use the ax again and again to free myself from the snakelike creepers that persisted in twining around my legs whenever I came near them. Without the ax I could never have gone more than ten feet into that tangle of trees and creepers.

For hours, it seemed, I was forcing my way through. The sun above me was visible only once in a long while. Now it seemed to be setting. All around me there was rustling and scraping of living things. I heard those wild, unearthly cries once or twice as I was forcing my way through.

Seeing an open, clear space a little ahead of me through the trees, I attacked the creepers and other obstructing growths with redoubled strength. It did not take me long to reach the open space ahead after that. I saw that I was once again on a beach, but it seemed strangely familiar, if anything on this strange, terrible world could be called familiar. With a shock it came to me that this was the very same beach I had quitted hours before, when I began to force my way into the impenetrable tangle of trees and creepers. I had been traveling in a circle!

It was rapidly growing dark. My thoughts turned to Grace. Where was she? Was my search to begin all over again on this strange world? I cursed No. 50, the supreme council, the whole Society of Man. I wished that they were here in my place experiencing the nerve-racking terrors of this terrible world to which they had hurled me and Grace.

I could not see very far in front of me. I tripped time and again over the snakelike creepers that were feeling for me. The air was warm. A heavy vapor was rolling from the forest. Staring through the deepening dusk was a point of light a little way off through the trees. I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I saw aright. It was still there. I realized that it was probably a fire A campfire!

With the light as a guide I made my way to the spot opposite on the beach. Then I saw what looked like a trail leading into the forest. I followed it through the thickening gloom.

After stumbling for the tenth time I thought of my flashlight in my inside pocket. I drew it forth and pressed the button. It threw a silvery beam of light ahead of me. I walked

on and on. The light grew larger and larger, although it was still a long way off. I now made out the flame of the fire leaping up into the air, and also smelt a faint odor of roast meat.

I suddenly realized how hungry I really was. The odor, faint though it was, set my mouth to watering. It smelt so good! How I longed to have some! No food had passed my lips since I had landed upon this world. I did not know what was safe to eat and what was poisonous.

And the sight of the fire heartened me, too; for it told me plainly that there were men, or creatures with manlike intelligence, here on this strange world.

I increased my pace. A thought struck me and made me come to a full stop. Perhaps the supreme council had sent other earthlings thither. Perhaps they were even members of the Society of Man. If they were, they would aid No. 50 against me.

I shut off the beam of my flashlight and put it back in an inside pocket of my vest. My hand next went to the holster under my left armpit and undid the flap. Then I gripped the haft of the ax in both my hands and went forward.

Voices now could be dimly heard in a sort of singsong chant. I went warily, making no noise. The chant grew louder as I drew nearer. Silence was no longer necessary, for they were making a terrific noise. The light from the leaping flames was now sufficient to see my way by. I tried to go slowly, but as the smell of roasting meat grew stronger in the air my movements quickened.

Without warning the trail opened up into a large cleared space. In the middle of it was a huge fire from which long, yellow flames shot up into the air. The whole cleared space seemed packed with a mass of swaying creatures that looked like gorillas. Their bodies were covered with a thick mat of hair, but by the light of the fire I clearly perceived that their features had a look of intelligence that could not be confused with the bestial features of a gorilla. There could be no doubt that they were the men of this world. Their forms were a little different, and protected with a coating of thick hair from the elements; otherwise they differed little from me, an ordinary earthling.

Their bodies were swaying back and forth in tune with the singsong chant. It was apparent, though I could not see them, that there were many hundreds of the men of this world, and that they were all young and strong looking. They all faced the center, where was a raised platform, a little to one side of the huge fire, and on it was one of these men dressed in a covering of woven strips of leaves from the frondlike trees. He was attending a small fire in front of him, on a flat rock. The man on the platform seemed to be some kind of a priest, and he was swaying back and forth over the little fire in front of him. Sitting a little to one side of him I made out an indistinct shape covered with a dull black cape from which white features were staring ahead, unseeingly. It was Grace!

[TO BE CONTINUED]

The Witch Of Kravetz

by Michael V. Simko

ON A newly constructed rostrum, publicly exposed to the devouring eyes of the populace, stood the famed beauty of Kravetz. With bowed head she submissively waited. A slight wind played havoc with her loosened flood of dark hair. The women saw it. They noted its abundance and glorious luster. Their hearts were sinful with envy.

Her divine form with its sensuous lines was suggested by a single wrapper that inadequately covered her quivering body. Like a martyr saint, she calmly expected her destruction. Slowly, inevitably, the clock approached the hour of noon.

IN THE southern part of Russia, some hundred kilometers back from the Black Sea, lies a fertile expanse of land, sparsely populated. As far as the eye can reach roll verdant pasture lands and arable ground.

This pleasant and productive territory of Kravetz was once under the dominion of a Count Daramkoff. Sacrilegious and tyrannical, Daramkoff ruled his peasants with the hand of a despot. But it is unkind to speak evil of the dead. And Daramkoff is dead.

The district with its scattered, low, whitewashed huts, acres of waving rye and rich brown tillable earth, pleased the eye as one let it survey the landscape, until it rebelled at the incongruous appearance, in this scene of contentment and harmony, of a small lake. Its stagnant water was putrid and infested with disease-carrying mosquitoes. A stunted growth of trees bordered this lake on one side. The opposite border presented a huge excavation, jagged piles of heavy stones, loads and loads of lumber and countless barrels of hardened mortar.

It was apparent that the erection of some edifice had been suspended. The confused growth of weeds, the decayed appearance of the stacked lumber, the wild grass struggling up between the rocks, the hardened mounds of earth, the deep cellar foundation crowded with underbrush and saplings, all indicated that this chaotic condition was not of recent years.

The natives tell tourists about this weird section. The region is haunted by a woman. Men are her chief victims. Echoing across the land come from the unfinished mansion the agonizing cries of this woman. Sometimes she sings. It is hard to resist listening to her song. The charm of her voice at night, like a siren's at sea, has lured many a young man to his death in the murky water of the lake.

None feared those nocturnal spectral sonatas more than Count Daramkoff and an aged, half-crazed man called Simeon Lavkovich. Of the latter it has been said that, unable to control himself, one night he roamed about the ghostly premises until he was positive the voice closed its deathly song with his name. In a sibilant whisper it trailed off "S-s-s-s-simeon, S-s-s-s-simeon".

Peasants found the man the following morning. He was exhausted. His head was white. He lay in a frightful fit on the edge of the lake not far from the neglected foundation. His eyes were terrible to see. He mumbled insanely, calling over and over a name that sounded like Lavinia.

They dragged him to his feet. His head fell forward. His bulging eyes saw, fastened to his coat lapel, strands of beautiful dark hair. He tore away the raven threads and his face was like putty. Cold drops of perspiration stood out all over it. He collapsed like a hysterical woman.

From that day, Simeon Lavkovich did not know his own mind. He tramped the streets. He ate whatever he found, in the gutters, in back yards. His life was a dog's life, a dog without a master. People pointed after him. The children, quick to grasp such things, found him a subject for their calls and ridicule. They jeered at him. They threw stones after him. They tapped their heads significantly. They stuck to his heels as he fearfully sought escape.

This was a pitiful reverse. The illiterate peasants knew nothing of Simeon before he came to their village. They could not know that once he mingled with Moscow's best society. It was better that they were in the dark about this fact.

SIMEON LAVKOVICH had been called to Kravetz from Moscow by Count Daramkoff to design a suitable palatial residence on the border of the lake in the count's estate. Simeon had gained enviable popularity as an architect. He was a carefree, dashing young man with blazing brown eyes and a defiant, stiff little mustache. He had the deportment of a prince, the intellect of a genius and the tongue of a poet.

The débutantes lavished their affections on him. And he was a fit subject. No girl could resist Simeon. Pompous matrons contrived to ensnare him. Simeon was considered a favorable matrimonial subject.

Simeon was not only an architect. He pursued this vocation for monetary reasons only. He liked to be poetic. He flavored all his actions with a peppering of romance. In his heart he believed some divine goddess would one day lay her soul at his feet. These pampered, idle, luxury-loving ladies nauseated his quixotic temperament. Their gold was venom in his flood of sentimentality.

Into this pool of disfavor came Daramkoff's opportune request. Simeon did not wait long to make reply. The social requirements of court life had gradually become so abhorrent to him that he gladly accepted the count's offer. With little delay and with abbreviated adieus to his many friends, Simeon set out for Kravetz, where a temporary home was erected for his exclusive use during the building of the count's mansion.

Simeon gave himself wholly to the task confronting him. He undertook the work with a zeal that surprized him. The new surroundings exhilarated him. He loved the simple peasants. He basked in the respect these naive illiterates tendered him, "a gentleman from the big city."

Fashion did not dictate here. He dressed as comfort suggested. No formality soured his carefree existence. He exulted in this new freedom. And he had foolishly caged himself in a city of big buildings and chained

his days to a program of social activity!

The excavation was completed and work was rapidly progressing on the foundation of the mansion when Simeon Lavkovich first met the famed beauty of Kravetz.

LATE one afternoon, Lavkovich galloped away on a wiry Cossack steed. He rode out of the domain of Kravetz and broke into a wild canter across the barren steppes adjoining the district. This limitless expanse enthralled him. The silence and magnitude of the rolling land was appalling. He rode over this waste with no regard for the time of day.

When the sun threatened to disappear below the horizon and an awesome dusk furtively crept over the land, Simeon brought up his horse with an ejaculation. His heart began to experience a fearsome constriction. How should he turn? How was he to be guided on his return?

He turned his horse and let the beast choose his own road. It was a long and lonesome ride, through a blackness that enveloped him like a cloak. His fatigued horse refused to respond to entreaties, spurs or whip, but staggered ahead with head almost reaching the ground. The silence of the steppes filled the man with unaccountable terror.

Simeon's strained eyes at length detected a distant glimmer of lights. He exclaimed like a truant boy. His heart pulsed happily. He begged his horse to quicken his pace. The patient steed must have sensed the proximity of humanity and possible prospects of food and rest, for he picked up his head, raised his ears and put new vigor into his exhausted limbs.

Before this lonely cottage Simeon drew rein. A haggard crone came in reply to his repeated knocking. She eyed him suspiciously. His plea did not interest her. She hardly waited for him to finish. He followed her. She silently led the way down a dimly lighted hall and motioned him to sit down in the adjoining room.

The man stood stupefied on the threshold. His amazed eyes surveyed the colorful landscapes on the walls, the unique draperies, the unexpected splendor of the furnishings. The sight of a grand piano was enough to astonish him—all this artistry in a peasant's hut!

He stepped into the center of the room, the better to observe a painting. The rustle of skirts and the slightest breath of a heavenly aroma startled him. He sensed another's presence in the room.

He turned slowly and almost gasped in dumfounded adoration. He wanted to fall on his knees in reverence. The blood rushed to his head. It pounded in his temples. His tongue was chained. The holy charm of her whirled him into another sphere.

Now he realized that he had fallen under the divine eyes of the noted "enchantress of the steppes". They called her that in Moscow. He had heard men speak of her. He had heard nobles rave over her. The unequaled charm of this woman was history. Men had offered fabulous riches to her. She had spurned them.

She stood tall and majestic in the doorway, the velvet portières parted by hands of a grace and whiteness he had never before beheld. An abundance of black glossy hair was coiled on her regal head. There was that white sheen to her forehead, neck and shoulders that recalled newly washed marble. In her adorable lips was that moist, pink fullness with a petulance that craved pressure from another's lips. In her eyes, scarcely glowing through half closed lids, smoldered the soft amorous fire that had seared the heart of many a noble, and would turn the heart of a monastic.

It had already wrought destruction with Simeon. He was shamefully disconcerted in her queenly presence.

"I am Lavinia Turgeno. Would you wish anything of me? My servant is dumb. She could make no answer to you."

It was a voice worthy of her white throat. Once, in a cathedral in Petrograd, Simeon had heard an organ. Her voice was like that, heavenly harmony.

At Moscow, Simeon was an intrepid youth. The glamor of jewels, the eyes of vain women, the prestige of titled names were only molehills to the fearless youth. Here, isolated from all social revelry, an unaffected, unadorned woman made him feel like a penitent schoolboy in the august presence of a new teacher. He recalled his dust-covered attire, his disheveled hair, and a new wave of despair and agitation played havoc with him.

"My servant will give you to eat. You must be hungry. The way to Kravetz is long. It is best you lodge here for the night. She will look to your comfort. Good night."

She was gone. There was an ebbing rustle and a vanishing atmosphere redolent of roses, and he was left alone. He swallowed with ease again. His heartbeat gradually subsided to normal. He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"You fool. You square-headed idiot," he hatefully denounced himself just as soon as he realized his tongue was at his own disposal once more. "Can't you talk to a lady when you see one?"

The servant interrupted his soliloquy. He followed her. The savory table reminded him of his neglected stomach. He set to it avidly. But not for long. There was no relish in his eating. Her visionary presence made everything else but looking at her distasteful.

The crone showed him to his room. He was tired. He lay in bed. He could not sleep. The darkness was ablaze with her face. Lavinia—Lavinia! Would she appear at breakfast? He could not leave without one more sight of her. Lavinia! Who could have selected a more suitable name? Her eyes would enslave all Moscow. Gad! If he could bring her out! Lavinia! A wonderfully charming name.

From that memorable night Simeon's heart knew no peace. He loved the lady with a madness that recognized no bounds. Like every other man, he fell to wondering why such a charming woman should seclude herself, and with a dumb servant live the life of a recluse. Why had she refused in marriage such men as had come to her from marble halls, and laden with purses heavy with gold? She was a lady with heart of stone, they said.

Simeon came again without being invited. He came many times. This was not to her liking. But Simeon was persistent. And Simeon had brown eyes and a stiff little mustache. She liked to see his mouth twitch. He smiled often and showed wonderful teeth.

Despite her aloofness and coldness toward him, Simeon Lavkovich would not be discouraged in his pursuit of her heart. One night, after he had said good-night, she came to the door. For a long time they looked into each other's eyes. A fearful fire burned in Simeon. A surge of passion possessed him. He refused to steel himself against it.

He dropped his hat. He caught her to him. He pressed her fervently against him. His mouth sought hers. She resisted. She surrendered. She melted in his embrace. She felt his lips tight against hers. Her head fell back. A thick strand of hair fell away from her right ear. It exposed a dark spot, not as large as a ten cent piece, just below her ear.

Lavinia started. She struggled out of his arms. Her face was crimson.

She hurriedly tried to arrange the truant strand. Simeon only laughed. He bent over her and kissed the discoloration.

The days hurried along. The foundation for the count's palace was nearing completion. It was almost time to lay the cornerstone.

Lavinia found her barrier crumbling. Long had she kept it impregnable to dukes and princes. A dashing, impecunious architect had undermined it. She could not repel the attention of Simeon any longer. She admitted that his impulsive manner and tempestuous lovemaking captivated her. She laughed when he told her that he would bring the priest to marry them.

They were not empty words. Simeon came one afternoon. The priest was with him. Lavinia turned white. Her voice trembled.

"Simeon Lavkovich—I can't—oh, I can't marry you—I can't—I can't!"

"But surely, my adored one, you will not refuse me! My love for you is like a fire. It is eating my soul away, and if you will not accept me I shall most certainly die of its burning. Tell me, at least, why it is you remain so cold to the blazing adoration of my love."

"Yes, yes, I—I will tell you." She wavered, then impetuously continued, "Oh, Simeon, I love you—"

The words filled him with a wild joy. He crushed her hard against him. His fervid kisses covered her neck and cheeks. Long they clung to the fullness of her lips. Those words had never before left her mouth. They fed the fire in his soul.

"Oh, my blessed one, my Lavinia, say no more. Come, let us be married. And, after the ceremony, if you wish, you can tell me what is troubling you. I am wild with happiness. You have made me insanely happy, my Lavinia."

He rushed out to call the priest and two friends who acted as witnesses. The charming Lavinia sank into a chair. She struggled to hold herself together. It was a severe trial, this marriage ceremony. Her only words to him were, "And Simeon, you'll not reproach me, you shall love me for all time—always, even though—"

"Hush, my dearest, even in eternity I shall adore you."

So they were married.

That day Simeon Lavkovich's star fell. He became a different man. Some said he had lost his reason. People marveled at the cruel reverse Lavkovich displayed. The serfs, a superstitious lot, had always doubted Lavinia. Now they became more bold and voiced their belief. Surely, the beautiful Lavinia had bewitched Simeon Lavkovich.

The young man began to drink heavily. His behavior terrified the natives. His despotic commandeering over the workmen became unbearable. They protested to Daramkoff. He listened, and came down to watch Simeon at work. In another day, Simeon was replaced by another capable man to complete the mansion.

The day for laying the cornerstone of the count's castle arrived. Kravetz and the surrounding country long anticipated this event, chiefly because a barbarous custom was to be enacted. It was the burying alive of a member of the female sex to fulfil the belief that "the living, quivering body of a girl would knit together the walls of the great building and preserve it against disaster in the future."

Count Daramkoff suggested that one day be devoted to volunteering. In the event a virgin did not offer herself as the victim of this sacrifice to a mass of stones, a married woman would be acceptable. On the other hand, if no volunteers appeared, all women of the village would be set in line and a committee would select the fairest ten. From this final group, the fatal choice would be made.

The woman must possess beauty without a blemish. Her condition must not be impaired by any significance of unhealthiness. It was believed a diseased person would bring sickness and misfortune to those living in the mansion.

Prior to the dreaded day of selection, after volunteers failed to present themselves, it became rumored that Simeon Lavkovich had offered his beautiful wife, Lavinia. She submitted herself as the subject of this sacrilegious practise. Such news was incredible. That the most charming woman of Kravetz should resign herself to such an ignoble fate when she could have lived in royal halls! And why should Simeon make such an offer to favor the man who had discharged him and pronounced him unfit to complete the work on his home?

The committee appointed by the count to choose the unfortunate woman gladly accepted Simeon's wife. They little relished picking out a girl for such a dreadful death. They wished their hands clean of blood and gladly agreed to Simeon's one condition: that instead of examining her they take his word for it that her beauty was without a mark and that her splendid appearance vouched for her robustness.

On the appointed day, late in August, long before sunrise, the people from far and near poured into Kravetz. The adjoining towns and hamlets had heard of the event. Such an affair came once in a lifetime. It attracted people from distant places. Every buttress, pinnacle, porch, window and roof that offered a point of vantage was congested with men and women and babbling children.

At a quarter of 12 the procession passed about the foundation. Lavinia was in the lead, sparsely clad in a wrapper that clung to her shapely body. The retinue consisted of the count, his family and intimate friends. They sat themselves on a bedecked stand while a guard assisted Lavinia up a pair of stairs to a rostrum erected for this special purpose.

She was the cynosure of all eyes. Her quiet composure appalled the multitude. The abundance of her thick, long hair fell over her shoulders down to her waist. Her queenly head was now modestly bowed. She felt the ruthless eyes of an avaricious throng searing her body.

The clock lacked a minute before the execution of this atrocious act. A silence covered Kravetz. The beating of hearts was almost audible in the oppressive stillness. A feverish glare came into the eyes of a tense crowd. Women clung to supports with nervous fingers.

One man, in an isolated corner on a housetop, was on the verge of collapse, but the seething fire of vengeance urged him to keep his place and witness the outcome of his craftiness. Simeon had reached the hour of his hateful triumph over the woman who had played him wrong and the man who had discharged him.

The voice of conscience hummed in his ear. In vain it whispered: "But was it not your own will that precipitated you into this marriage? Had she not warned and resisted you? Your ear was deaf to all she would say."

He refused to listen. He hardened himself against this ordeal by having frequent recourse to a bottle hid in his coat. In maudlin tones he incoherently mumbled something about beauty and health. He would bring in the count's name. Then he would laugh in a way that was not pleasant to hear.

The time had come. The count's arm was raised. The multitude did not breathe. The arm was motionless. A heartaching second followed. Then the hand fell. It was the signal.

A cord attached to Lavinia's single piece of raiment was drawn. With a swish, the wrapper left the girl. It was an awful moment. The charm of her body was exposed to prove to the people that she was sound and beautiful.

The frightful sight of her nudity stunned the spectators. Women screamed and covered their faces with their aprons. Men turned away. A wild cry went up to heaven. The nobility stood up in a body. Daramkoff swore shamefully. Before he could remonstrate, before his agonized cry, "Away, away with her!" had left his mouth, the sacrifice was completed.

His words came too late. By some misapprehension, the rostrum was prematurely destroyed. It crashed into the excavation ready for it and the suspended giant buckets suddenly precipitated tons of earth upon the body of beautiful Lavinia, smothering her last and only cry. Some said it was a prayer for mercy. Some said it was a burning curse.

Simeon hid himself. His foresight had selected a place several days previous.

The amazed multitude dispersed in fearful awe. They blessed themselves repeatedly. The women affirmed their suspicions. Like fire spread the gossip, "Truly she was a witch."

In the brief time of exposition the populace well saw Lavinia's body. The skin was that of a leopard's. Ugly, irregular black spots disfigured the whiteness of her body. And the naive peasants called it witchcraft.

The physician in attendance, a guest of the count, later explained to Daramkoff: "The woman was suffering a condition known as melanosis, in which the skin becomes abnormally crowded with dark pigmentation. In some cases the entire body is covered with this hideous discoloration. Save for the spot below her ear, Lavinia was fortunate to be able to keep her condition a secret, except, of course, from the man who married her."

In WEIRD TALES Next Month

THE RED LILY

By JOHN LEE MAHIN, JR.

Red indeed was the lily, drenched in the life-blood of him who had committed the unforgivable sin.

On Sale At All News Stands June First

A Powerful Tale from the Superstitious History of the Black Republic

LIPS *of the* DEAD

By W. J. STAMPER

"DOWN with Théodor! Death to Black Oscar!"

It was the raucous, horrifying yell of the inevitable Haitian mob as it assembled in the historic Champs de Mars outside the palace in Port au Prince, the scene of hundreds of such meetings that had never meant less than murders and gutters flowing red with human blood. The rapacious rule of President Théodor and his favorite general, Black Oscar, was tottering to its fall. That day Théodor had violated a sacred session of the Senate and dissolved it at the point of the bayonet because it had, for the second time, refused to support him in a dastardly measure to filch more money from the already pauper citizenry.

As night came on, aged senators lay cringing in the filthy prison, in the courtyard of the palace, and double sentinels paced the flagstones outside.

In the domed council chamber of the palace sat Papillon, the favorite senator of the common people, bound hand and foot, subjected to the jeers and insults of the two beasts. Théodor, lean and emaciated, his yellow, pock-marked face pinched with terror, fingered nervously some loose papers that lay on the table. Oscar, a giant in stature, with a waxed mustache curling up crescent-shaped till the two points almost met above his gaping, black nostrils, pounded his huge fist on the table and fixed his sinister gaze on Papillon.

"Do you think we sleep, idiot?" he stormed. "It is your tongue that has sown the seeds of unrest among the populace and stirred them to rebellion against our authority. What have you to say to this—and this?" He thrust two papers into the face of Papillon, and his black face twitched with rage.

"I should think it would be unnecessary for *le général* to rob the mails for the same information he might easily obtain by listening to any group of citizens conversing on our street corners. It is the sentiment of all true Haitians. You have robbed the coffers of the treasury; you have murdered our best citizens; and now you seek the aid of the Senate in carrying out your cursed schemes," sarcastically answered Papillon.

Stung by the truth of this remark, Oscar lifted his great fist and crashed it against the thin lips of the helpless prisoner. Blood streamed from the cracked lips, ran down the chin and stained the white bosom of the senator's shirt. Papillon, still holding high his proud head, mumbled through his bleeding lips:

" 'Tis no better nor redder than that you spilled at Mole St. Nicholas when you shot down Vilbrun, or when you butchered the patriot, Céléstin, at Jacmel. It is the blood of Haiti."

As Papillon finished speaking, in through the window shone the baleful red glare of the torches of the mob, and through the casement came fren-

zied yells: "Down with Théodor! Death to Oscar!"

Théodor shivered as he sensed the woful power behind this thing that he hated and feared, and his lips trembled as he turned to Oscar.

"Has not *le général* some plan? Something must be done," he whined.

"If they become unruly we can toss—we can toss them a head," answered the black brute as he curled his waxed mustache and shot a wicked glance at the bleeding Papillon.

"I have ever been the first to draw my sword for Haiti—I have lived for her and her misguided people—and, *mon général,* I shall gladly offer my life and my blood for her," came from the puffed lips of the prisoner.

"Cur! Worshiper of voodoo!" shrieked Théodor as he confronted Papillon. "You shall speak to the vermin from yonder window—order them to return to their homes, or I swear by the great Capoix, your head shall roll at their feet."

"Excellency, I am at your service. Such has been the course of liberty for a thousand years—blood, torture, death. Long live the common people! Long live liberty!"

WITHOUT another word Théodor seized him by the collar, lifted him from the chair, snatched the gleaming sword from the scabbard and plunged it through the body of the patriot. With a gurgling groan Papillon sank to the floor, while a crimson stream, gushing from a jagged wound in the breast, poured over the carpet of the room. Then with one horrible stroke Théodor severed the head from the trunk. The gory thing, rolling a few feet, stood upright on the bloody, slippery stub, then slid on across the room to the wall. There it sat in the pale light of the lamp, and the hair, still unruffled, was smoothly parted in the middle. Then occurred the most singularly awe-inspiring thing that ever greeted the eyes and ears of mortal man. What do men yet know of the mysteries of voodoo—its powers—the miracles it may perform?

Two great tears oozed from the eyes and dropped to the floor. The dead lips moved and a voice issued from the crimson mouth.

"Tomorrow, Théodor, tomorrow!"

Slowly the quivering lids closed over the glazing eyeballs, then opened, and the eyes fixed in the icy stare of death.

Théodor laughed a hoarse, bestial laugh, wiped the thickening gore from his blade on the leg of his trousers and said: "Tomorrow, Théodor, tomorrow! A pretty speech indeed, General."

Picking up the ghastly head by the long black hair and holding it as far away as possible, Théodor walked to the window and deliberately hurled it out into the very face of the mob, yelling through the casement as he watched it catapult across the street: "Haitians, this is but the beginning! Depart at once, lest all the others meet the fate of Papillon."

Screams of rage rent the night. Crash on crash of musketry in the street below. The mob had rushed the gate and the troops had opened fire.

It was the terrified voice of Théodor. "We must flee, General! To the French legation for our lives!"

"My soldiers will defend the palace to the last man, Excellency. If we must go down, let us go down in a blaze of blood. To the prison!"

THE helpless senators cringed beneath the covers as the sentinel passed. His clanking bayonet scabbard sent a hollow sound through the corridors, while his footfalls sounded like some weird echo in an empty tomb.

A key grated in the lock. Théodor and Oscar entered, and the murderous work began. Silently they went from

man to man. There was a sickening, slushing sound as the sharp points of their blades found the vitals of those dark masses beneath the ragged covers of the rickety bunks. Now and then a stifled groan, a rattle in the throat, which was suddenly choked by a rush of blood. This ghastly work lasted but a few minutes, and a crime was consummated that will forever brand Haiti as an outlaw among nations. With his own hands, Oscar put out the one dim light, and following in the wake of the butcher, left the room to darkness and the dead.

Their vile work finished, Théodor and Oscar fled through the night and sought shelter at the French legation.

Daylight revealed their absence from the palace. News of the massacre spread like wildfire to every nook and corner of the city. The troops defending the palace fled when they discovered their chiefs had deserted them. Papillon had been followed in death by all the other senators, and their souls cried aloud for vengeance.

Groups of cursing men and weeping women rushed from house to house, from hiding place to hiding place. Swift horsemen galloped over the roads leading to Gonaives and Saint Marc in search of the fugitives.

The sun was low in the heavens, when at length came word that Théodor and Oscar had been found in hiding at the French legation. The bugles sounded the assembly, and the bloodthirsty mob, armed with axes, spades and whatever other weapons could be procured, moved upon the legation. The streets were choked with a seething, writhing mass of humanity, undulating like some huge serpent as it approaches its prey.

The warning voice of the gray-haired consul, as he stood on the portico of the legation house, pleading with the bloodthirsty mob to remember the sacredness of an embassy, was drowned with rasping yells.

"Give us Théodor! Give us Black Oscar!"

There was a sudden irresistible surge of that black mass. The gate and fence went down with a crash. On, on, up to the very doors it went. There was a splintering of wood, a rattling of broken glass, screams and shrieks. Oscar was dragged out first, and his body riddled with bullets. As his black carcass lay in the gutter, oozing red from a thousand punctures, and the thick tongue lolled out from between the yellow teeth, cheer after cheer went up from the multitude.

The exit of Théodor was more orderly. With downcast eyes his lean figure shambled out of the building between three huge blacks, one of whom carried three stout ropes. The mob gave back to permit ample passage, and strangely enough the street looking westward was without a single soul. There was at last a peculiar system, even in its innate madness, in which this mob carried out its vengeance.

The prisoner arrived at the edge of the street amid deafening shouts: "Murderer, where is our Papillon?"

A buggy arrived pulled by a strong Haitian mule.

Now, as if by mutual consent, the three blacks took charge of the situation. They proceeded to secure the end of one rope about the neck of Théodor, the other end to the axle of the buggy. The other two ropes were fastened above the ankles, leaving one end of each free. The ropes about the ankles were, however, much longer than the one about the neck. As certain ones of the mob grasped the intention of the three blacks they gave loud and prolonged cheers of approval.

At last all was ready. The buggy was in motion toward the west. Théodor, striving to keep on his feet, had his legs jerked from under him by the

two men manning the loose ends of the ropes about his ankles. He was bruised beyond description. His neck was scarred and bleeding from the noose, his tongue swollen and covered with dust. Bloody froth oozed from his nose and mouth as he was jolted from one side of the street to the other.

Suddenly he ceased to struggle and strive to keep his feet. There was apparent a certain limpness of the body that gave evidence of unconsciousness. Two trails of red showed in the street behind where the body was being dragged. Sharp stones wearing through the clothing had bit into the bare flesh.

Onward this weird procession went, followed by the crowding, yelling, approving mob, onward toward the west. At length the buggy stopped beneath the shadow of the Sacred Arch. The mob, like hungry vultures encircling a piece of carrion, surged around in a great circle with eyes staring and necks craning lest one single detail of this noisome scene be missed.

There fell upon this vengeful multitude a solemn silence, as from somewhere came the measured beat of the tom-tom—a terrible sound, such a sound as is heard in the fastness of the northern mountains when the priest leads the death march. One of the blacks was untying the ropes from the gory victim; another was removing the grime and dirt from the distorted face with a damp gunny sack.

What could this mean? Could it be that the hearts of those two men were relenting? Low growls and sharp hisses escaped from the mob. A bottle of spirits, the powerful heathen rum, was held beneath the distended nostrils. A few drops were poured into the gaping, bruised mouth. A convulsive shudder passed through the body. The chest heaved, rose and fell. Consciousness was returning.

The circle had narrowed and the mob was on the point of pouncing upon the reviving victim, when one of the blacks, rising from where he knelt over the prostrate figure, extended his hamlike hand high above his head and shouted with such a stentorian voice that it could be heard by the most distant one of the crowd:

"Are you fools, Haitians? Would you have this beast who has glutted himself upon our reddest blood die before your vengeance has been appeased? Let us torture him; let him writhe in agony; is that not good, countrymen?"

"Yes, yes!" came the answer from every mouth of that vast and blood-craving throng.

A ladder was placed against the face of the Sacred Arch. The last rays of the setting sun shed a purplish light over the city; the drums beat the measured march of the dead. Théodor opened his bleary eyes and shuddered.

Two long ropes were tied under the armpits. Two heavy stones, attached to the other ends, were hurled over the top of the arch. Slowly, but without much difficulty, two men hoisted upward the spare, bedraggled figure of Théodor; upward, till it dangled against the solid wall of the archway. Loud jeers rent the gathering dusk of approaching night: *"Vive le président! Vive Théodor!"*

Now one of the blacks was mounting the ladder. He carried under his arm a small chest, such a chest as carpenters use.

The mob, expectant, gloating, their hawklike eyes on the cruel scene, stood breathless—waiting.

At last the top was reached. The black secured the peculiar chest to the topmost rung. The mob surged up about the foot of the ladder. A thousand eager, curious faces were upturned, as he seized the right arm of Théodor, extended it to full length along the wall and, without looking,

scrambled among the contents of the chest. He drew out a small hand-ax and a long spike. With one powerful blow he drove the pointed nail through the bony hand, deep into the adobe of the wall.

Beads of black blood trickled down and spattered in the dust below. Mortal agony twisted and distorted the pock-marked face of Théodor, and sharp rasping cries issued from the swollen mouth. Another blow, in strange unison with the beat of the tom-tom, pinioned the other arm. The legs dangled; the body writhed in the throes of approaching death. The skinny legs were drawn apart. Again, and yet again, rose and fell the fatal ax. There was a gritting sound, such as is made by the surgeon's saw, when the cruel spikes pierced the bones of the feet.

"*Vive Théodor! Vive Théodor!*" shrieked the demoniacal mob.

Mortal man could not long survive such inhuman torture. Slowly the head sank down upon the scrawny chest; the eyes bulged from their sockets. The cooling blood had ceased to flow and now merely oozed from around the nails.

Grasping the disheveled hair with his left hand, the black straightened up the bowed head. The ax ascended once more and there was a sickening thud as it fell upon the distended leaders of the bare throat.

THE mob slunk back as the gory head dropped to the street, rolled a few feet, stood upright on the bloody stub of the neck. As the glazing eyeballs fixed in the cold stare of death, there issued from the purple lips a scarcely audible murmur:

"Today, Papillon, today!"

Had Black Oscar been yet among the living, he alone, of all that multitude, would have noted how strangely these words from dead lips appeared an answer to the words from other dead lips, once sadly murmured at dead of night, in the domed council chamber of the palace.

FIDEL BASSIN

By W. J. STAMPER

The author of "Lips of the Dead" will have another eery story of Haiti in the next issue of WEIRD TALES—a story of the ambitious and cold-blooded negro lieutenant who carried out the ruthless commands of the Haitian dictator, and of the weird and terrible punishment inflicted upon him.

On Sale At All News Stands June First

It Is Not to Be Wondered at that This Man Became a Maniac

The HOUSE, *the* LIGHT *and the* MAN

By GORDON PHILIP ENGLAND

Author of "Adventures of an Astral" and "The Master of Hell"

THE house sits back some distance from the highway. All else around is pleasing to the view, but this dark, grim building is a blot on the landscape. Encircled by a tall, ragged hedge, which conceals the lower part of the building from the eyes of passers-by, it seems almost like a portion of another world, and has little in common with neighboring dwellings.

People going by glance up at the gloomy edifice with feelings akin to terror, then hurry on. After turning a curve in the road beyond, they breathe a sigh of relief, feeling as a prisoner freed from captivity might feel.

That is during daytime. At night, few pedestrians are daring enough to pass that dwelling.

Even motorists, when realizing they have reached its vicinity, nervously increase their speed and, sweeping by in a swirl of dust, leave the gloomy pile far behind.

Yet few can pass without first turning their eyes toward a narrow window near the top of the building. For from that window gleams the light, and they know that in the room behind the casement is the man who fears the dark. They know the light is always there during hours of darkness, and will doubtless always be there while the man lives.

Once (it happened some weeks after the man had come) the light went out. And even yet, though that was fifteen years ago, dwellers in near-by houses shudder when they remember the sounds that were heard on that occasion. The unearthly shrieks, the piercing cries of utter anguish, the screams of direst terror—all these ring in their ears as they recall that evening. And nightly, before retiring, they pray that the light may not go out.

Their prayer has been mercifully answered. For when the first shadows of twilight begin to fall, the light also appears, to burn with steady, undiminished power until darkness is past.

It has never gone out again, and probably never will until the man dies. Then, and not until then, it will be extinguished.

GIBSON JENKINS pressed the elevator bell impatiently. He glanced down the shaft expectantly.

But the elevator did not appear. He waited several minutes. Still it did not come.

Jenkins was much annoyed. He had now been waiting nearly ten minutes. Ten minutes seems a long time to a man who is in a hurry.

It was the first time Gibson Jenkins had ever been in this department store. He had gone to see the man-

ager that afternoon to transact an item of business. While they had been discussing terms, the telephone had rung, and after taking the message the manager had gone out, telling Jenkins he would be back within five minutes. Five minutes had lengthened into a half hour, but the manager had not returned.

Had Jenkins but known it, there had been excellent reason for his non-appearance. While attempting to cross the street ahead of traffic, he had been knocked down by a motor car, and was now in an ambulance en route to a repair shop.

Jenkins, of course, was unaware of this. However, he had decided not to wait longer, and was now standing peering down the elevator shaft, muttering anathemas against managers and elevator boys alike.

After ringing several more times, he suddenly remembered that the closing whistle had blown several minutes before, and realized the elevator boy had left the building.

He also remembered having seen a flight of stairs at the other end of the corridor. So he went back to look for them.

It was growing dark inside the building. Jenkins noticed this, and glanced at his watch nervously.

It was exactly fifteen minutes past 6.

Jenkins disliked darkness and had no desire to remain in the store longer. Hurrying to the stairway, he commenced the descent hastily.

Haste is not always expedient. Jenkins was too hasty. Consequently, his foot slipped. He lost his balance and plunged downward. His head struck the bottom step rather forcibly, and, the step being composed of cement, he immediately lost interest in his surroundings.

GIBSON JENKINS opened his eyes wonderingly.

He was much dazed, and some minutes elapsed before he could recall what had occurred.

It had been twilight when he had fallen, but it was now very dark. He could not remember ever having been in so dark a place before.

Slowly he sat up and looked around. But it was too dark to see anything. The only thing he could discover was that he was at the bottom of the flight.

Drawing his luminous-faced watch from his pocket, he tried to ascertain the time of night. It was exactly fifteen minutes past 6.

This perplexed him. It had been fifteen minutes past 6 when he had fallen, hadn't it? How then, could it be the same time now?

He puzzled over the matter for quite a while without arriving at a satisfactory conclusion. Then, a thought leaked through into his slowly clearing brain, and holding the watch to his ear, he listened. Yes, it had stopped.

Jenkins pressed tremulous hands against his throbbing temple.

"How long have I been lying here?" he wondered aloud.

As if to answer his question, a big clock somewhere in the building began to chime the hour. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven!

Jenkins struggled to his feet. Eleven o'clock! He had been unconscious nearly five hours!

He began to grope his way up the stairs. He was very weak, but a plan had formulated within his mind: he would go back to the manager's office and telephone for help.

But on reaching the top of the steps, he stood bewildered. He had forgotten in which direction the office lay.

After a moment, though, he struck blindly through the intense darkness

toward where he thought the room ought to be.

Having walked several feet, he bumped against a wall. Turning, he walked in the opposite direction, hands before him, seeking for the office door.

But it was his head that struck it finally, not his hands—struck with such force that the door swung open; and stumbling through the aperture, Jenkins fell upon hands and knees on the floor within.

Rising painfully, he groped for the telephone. But though he knocked against other objects in the room, the telephone itself eluded him.

Jenkins was now becoming frightened. He was naturally a timid man, and the events of the night had not increased his courage.

He tried again to locate the telephone, but still without success.

Then he searched his pockets for a match. And to his surprize; for he was not in the habit of carrying them, he found a solitary lucifer. He lit it, and looked eagerly about him. And then the match fell from his palsied fingers to the floor, flickered, and went out.

Gibson Jenkins had seen enough—in fact he had seen too much. He was not in the office after all: he was in a room full of coffins!

With a horrified exclamation, Jenkins dashed for the door. And for the second time that night haste proved his undoing. For he ran directly against it, and it slammed shut.

Frantically Jenkins searched for the door knob. Finally finding it, he tried to pull the door open. To his horror it resisted his effort. He pulled harder, exerted every iota of his strength; but the door remained fast. It was equipped with a spring lock.

In a corner of the coffin room crouched Gibson Jenkins. He was shivering from head to foot, like a man with the ague. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead and trickled slowly down his cheeks.

It was no longer utterly dark in that room: the moon had come up and her pale rays, streaming through a window, partly illuminated the coffin chamber. Jenkins could make out indistinctly the dim shapes of the coffins around him, which were piled one upon another to a height of several feet.

Jenkins was not looking at these, however, so much as at a large coffin in the middle of the floor at the opposite side of the room. Upon this one his attention was riveted. He felt that in this coffin lay danger.

He seemed to sense another presence in the room. He could not see it, yet he was nevertheless positive it was there. And he was also sure it was the big coffin which contained that dangerous presence. So he squatted huddled in a shaking, shuddering heap, with frightened eyes fixed upon the casket.

He remembered many things while crouching there—remembered how he had once laughed at a friend who had related a supernatural experience, and how that friend had warned him, telling him spirits often punish those who dare disbelieve in them. He remembered, too, the other ghost stories he had been told and had read, and at the remembrance he shuddered more than before.

And he watched the coffin with a feeling that the thing contained therein was watching him also, and was noting his every motion. At the thought, he shrank farther into his corner, seeking to escape its gaze. Yet still it seemed following him.

Now, to his horror, Jenkins began to feel a desire to go over to the coffin. He thrust back the desire, but still it gripped him. His body and will were struggling for mastery, and body triumphed. He began moving toward the coffin. He tried to hold back his body, but still it advanced. Nearer

and nearer he glided to that dreadful presence.

Again the big clock struck. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. It was midnight!

The sound appeared to paralyze Gibson Jenkins. He no longer moved in the direction of the coffin. Instead, he squatted stockstill in the middle of the chamber.

Then, to his consternation, the lid of the coffin began to rise.

Higher and higher it rose, until at last the wretched man beheld a form leaving the casket.

And then shriek after shriek reechoed through the old building.

IN THE morning, attracted by strange sounds emanating from the coffin room, some employees opened the door. There, squatted upon the floor, rocking backward and forward, mouthing and gibbering inarticulately, was a white-haired, old-looking man whom none of them recognized. Later, however, they discovered the name Gibson Jenkins on calling cards in his pockets. A few days afterward, the manager, after leaving the hospital, positively identified him.

When the employees found him, he was facing a big coffin lying in the center of the room. The lid of the coffin had been raised, and the casket was empty.

A window at one end of the room was unlocked and open. It was only a ten-foot drop to the roof of an adjoining building.

On the preceding afternoon a thief had scooped several rings and watches from a tray in the jewelry department on the next floor. The floorwalker had given chase, but had lost him in the crowd. The detective at the entrance, however, had claimed the man had not passed him.

A thorough search of the building had revealed nothing, though, so it had been thought the detective had been mistaken.

Now the management believed the thief had not left the building, after all, but had concealed himself in the coffin, intending to come out later and obtain other booty. He had remained in the casket several hours, wishing to assure himself that the coast was clear before continuing operations.

Then Gibson Jenkins had entered the room, and by locking the door spoiled the robber's plans. But by making sundry weird noises the burglar had worked upon Jenkins' superstitious nature until he had reduced him to a state of helpless fright. Then, leaving the casket, the thief had made good his escape.

That was the theory of the management of the department store.

His physician endeavored to make clear that theory to Gibson Jenkins. But Gibson Jenkins was totally unable to understand it. Indeed, as Gibson Jenkins, he no longer existed. He had now become simply a man who feared the dark.

A HUNDRED yards back from the road stands the house. It is a strange-looking house, a house which people shun. From a window of that house shines the light; in the room whence the light shines is a man, a man afraid of the dark. The window is barred with rusty iron bars. And the house is—a madhouse!

INVADERS FROM THE DARK

by Greye La Spina

A Serial Novel

Author of "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," "The Remorse of Professor Panebianco," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Sophie Delorme, coming to live with her niece, the young widow Portia Differdale, finds that noble woman engaged in carrying on her deceased husband's warfare against the unseen powers of evil.

The Russian Princess Irma Andreyevna Tchernova has come to live in the old Burnham mansion, accompanied by five pet wolves, which she keeps in a wolf-den in the Burnham grounds. She proceeds to flirt with Owen Edwardes, with whom Portia Differdale is in love.

Princess Tchernova excites the comment of the tradespeople by ordering great quantities of red meat, ostensibly for her wolves. She spreads the rumor abroad that Portia's two magnificent wolfhounds are running wild at night. A few nights thereafter, Policeman O'Brien is attacked by a white animal, presumably a large dog, and severely bitten. The animal is put to rout by Portia's two wolfhounds, Boris and Andrei. Portia's mother-in-law and sister-in-law, as well as the princess, spread the rumor that it was one of Portia's wolfhounds that attacked the policeman.

Portia suspects the princess of being an evil being, a werewolf, capable of metamorphosing herself into a wolf, and explains to her aunt the reasons for her belief. She suspects that the princess, in her mad infatuation for Owen Edwardes, plans to metamorphose him as her mate.

Officer O'Brien, and later Officer Murphy, disappear while on duty. Portia and her aunt, spying on the princess, are pursued by some white animal, which Portia believes to be the princess in her werewolf form. After each of the disappearances, the princess cuts down her order for meat at the butcher's.

Poisoned meat is thrown where the wolfhounds can get it, and Andrei eats some and dies. Shortly afterward, Minna Differdale, the child of Portia's sister-in-law, disappears in the grounds of the princess' home. The officers hear her scream, and rush to the place, but Minna has disappeared. They believe Minna has been abducted by a passing automobilist, but Portia thinks the princess, transformed into a wolf, has killed the girl.

PART 13

PORTIA flung herself down upon the cushions near me, her eyes blazing with that somber light so unlike her usual gentle expression.

"Oh, it seems incredible! And yet—even the most skeptical would have to believe, after learning what I have learned. I must work hard from now on, or that fiend in human form will have gotten the best of us all—and that house will have become a veritable shambles. Ugh!"

"And Owen?"

She turned melting eyes upon me; her lips quivered until she drew them firmly together into a straight line.

"Owen, Auntie? Oh, he must be the least in my thoughts, Owen whom I love! It may be that I shall be called upon to sacrifice even Owen, to save others for whom I care nothing!"

"Portia! Sacrifice Owen?"

"Auntie, to snare that ancient evil I may be obliged to permit Owen to walk into her net. That's what I mean. Don't think I want to do it. God knows I don't. But God knows, too, that from now on my life is dedi-

cated to this one thing, to thwart and balk the evil that lives in the white body of the Russian woman."

I dared not speak. Despite my fluttering doubts, my spirit of modern incredulity, I had come to accept Portia's great knowledge of the ancient mysteries, of the old-time occultism, as matters of fact. There was much that I could not understand then; yet I believed, if not in the things of themselves, in Portia's knowledge and her belief in them. I knew, intuitively, that my niece was not out of her head; I knew that she had mastered deep truths, on the dim verge of knowing which I was still shrinking, out of terror at what I felt full acceptance and belief would bring upon my soul. So I remained silent, but ready to acquiesce in whatever Portia should propose.

I think she sensed my feeling, for she looked at me all at once, and a smile that came close upon tears passed over her sweet face. She put out one hand, laying it on mine.

"I must not let my emotions master me, Auntie. I must be very, very strong. It is when we permit our feelings to get the better of our minds that we become weak and lose our grip on things. And now" (she changed her gentle tones for others more brisk) "I suppose you want to know all about my visits tonight?"

It had been too late, she told me, to save Minna Arnold. The terrified and grief-stricken mother had promised, however, not to let Alice out of her sight after dark, and especially not to let her go across the boulevard alone, or to the house of the princess, if unaccompanied.

"She doesn't understand, of course, why I laid so much stress on the latter point," Portia said wearily, "but it isn't necessary for her to understand, if she will only keep her word to me."

The story was going the rounds that Minna had been kidnaped on her return from the princess' residence. It was better so, of course. Willard and O'Toole would not, after all, swear to the white wolfhound, although in private Willard told Portia he was quite sure he had seen Agathya's stooping figure run across the road and into the shrubbery about the princess' grounds, as the two officers approached. This might have been an optical illusion, Willard admitted, and when Portia asked him not to mention it, he agreed readily, remarking that there was something uncanny about the whole business, and that the sooner he could be transferred to another beat, the better pleased he'd be. He said he couldn't forget the glowing red eyes of the white hound that had chewed his shoulder, and he was sure it hadn't been Boris or Andrei.

"About my visit to the princess, Auntie. Sergei managed to make me understand in broken English, and by signs, that she could not be seen, as she had retired early with a sleeping potion because of a headache. This is what he also managed to make O'Toole understand. Agathya—oh, that Russian woman isn't human!—she's a fiend! I can reconstruct that whole business now, Auntie.

"The princess ordered Agathya to drag Minna into the house when the child came to the door. Agathya, fearing to become a victim herself unless she obeyed her mistress, implicitly did as she was ordered. Then she took the chocolates down to the boulevard and scattered them over the road, and when that was done, she screamed, once. Then she rushed back and hid. And meantime" (she shuddered, but controlled herself quickly), "meantime, the princess in her metamorphosed state dragged the wretched child down into the basement—"

"Portia, that is too much! I can't believe it! It's too horrible! It's too incredible!" I groaned.

"Poor Auntie, I don't blame you. But it's only too true."

I recovered myself somewhat. "Go on, Portia," I said.

"Agathya, I believe, refused to be a party to the murder of that child. I imagine she has rebelled from time to time and has had to suffer accordingly until she was bent to her mistress' wicked will."

"Portia—it's awful!"

"She was lying on the cushions in the great salon, Auntie. I pushed my way in, although Sergei tried to prevent me. Agathya lifted those terribly pathetic dog's-eyes to my face, turned her head to Sergei with fear written on her countenance, mingled with determination, then with a sudden motion pulled down her dress from her shoulders and disclosed bleeding welts—all raw—from the blows of a knout! Oh, you may shudder and shrink, Auntie; it turned me sick, I can tell you."

"What did Sergei do then?" I was trembling as I asked.

"He came across the room and drew her dress gently up into place over her shoulders. Then he pointed to the door and looked me straight in the eyes, with a gesture of resignation. I bent down and caressed that poor, broken creature at my feet. Sergei had said nothing, but I understood; my stay would only make it harder for Agathya. I went at once."

"But how did you find out about Minna?" My shudders shook me uncontrollably.

"Sergei made me understand. He knows very little English, but he told me plainly enough with what he knew, by combining it with gestures."

"And you believed?" I reproached her.

"Yes, Auntie, I realized that I was too late. You see, I told him at once that I knew what the princess was. '*Volkodlak*', he repeated after me, his eyes aflame. Then he beat his hands upon his breast, repeating over and over, 'Sergei—love—*volkodlak*'."

"Oh, how can he? A fiend like that!"

"Love doesn't go where it's commanded, Auntie," Portia reminded me sadly. "When he saw that I understood what he wanted to convey to me, he picked up—oh, Auntie, Auntie!—a glove that lay on the mantel over the fireplace—a man's glove that I knew, because I had mended a little rip in it one afternoon a few weeks ago—and as he showed it to me, with a fierceness in his eyes that told of his burning, implacable jealousy—'Ow-een,' he said to me. 'Ow-een—*volkodlak!*' Then I came away quickly, because I could not contain myself any longer, and I had to see someone who was good and gentle and self-sustained, like you, Auntie."

"Owen, a werewolf? No, no, I don't believe it!" I cried out in vehement denial.

Portia spoke again, after a moment's silence.

"Agathya is dumb," she said, as if irrelevantly. "Her tongue is out. She had to be made a safe servant for such a dangerous mistress."

I began to sob dryly. I couldn't control my nervous shudders. The thought that the world held such demons at large was too much for me. Portia let me sob in silence for a few minutes; then she suggested that I let her give me a sleeping potion that would insure sound, dreamless slumber.

She came into my room when I was ready for bed, and brought me a glassful of what seemed to be a delicious raspberry vinegar, but, innocuous though it appeared, it made me sleep more soundly than I can remember having slept for years; the moment my head touched the pillow I was asleep, and I did not waken until nearly 10 o'clock the following day,

when I found myself refreshed wonderfully and prepared to face almost anything.

I may as well remark here, that when I wakened in the morning, my so-called "common sense" had once more taken command of my mind, and I thought of my credulity of the previous night with rather a pained smile. I have read since that psychic researchers often find that what impresses them deeply when they are in the midst of their psychic work loses its depth and significance after the passing of a few hours of commonplace life. It was so with me. I waked with a clear head, and the thought that poor Minna had been kidnaped, and that Portia's talk with me was nothing but part of a strange dream.

OWEN EDWARDES had called up about 9 o'clock. Portia told me. She came in when she heard me stirring about. Owen had had a message from the princess, who had sent for him at once upon hearing the news from her servants in the morning. She had begged him to tell the police that she was shocked to have had such a thing happen to the child on its way back from her house, and wished to offer a reward of a thousand dollars for news leading to the recovery of the kidnaped child.

Owen was very enthusiastic about the princess' kindly interest. He added that of course she was in no wise to blame for the unhappy occurrence, but that she kept blaming herself for having asked the child to come for the candy at night. Portia repeated the conversation, without letting her own knowledge, or her own feelings, tinge the recital of Owen's message.

The princess had asked him to thank Mrs. Differdale for her call on the night before, and regretted that her headache had incapacitated her for receiving unexpected callers! Portia did not think that either Sergei or Agathya had told their mistress of her visit; she imagined that Owen had let the fact drop unintentionally (he had accompanied her to the door that night), or else the princess had been cognizant of what was passing between her servants and Portia.

I thought it very decent of the princess, at least, to offer a reward for the kidnapers of Minna. You see, my "common sense" was ruling my mind for the moment.

"Very decent," said Portia.

I felt something intangibly critical in her tone, but while I wanted to tell her that we'd both been incredibly silly in our surmises the preceding night, she gave me no opportunity. Afterward I knew that she was perfectly aware of the fading of psychic impressions with the passage of a few hours, so she alertly avoided an argument.

IT MUST have been just before lunchtime that I heard a siren outside and looked from my upper window over the wall to see the limousine of the Princess Tchernova standing before the house. Sergei got down from the seat, but he did not open the car door as I expected; instead, he came directly toward our wall and disappeared in the shadow. A moment later, the bell pealed.

I was much excited. What message could the princess be sending to us? I heard Fu speak to Portia, who was in the library with Boris, and presently I heard the Chinaman usher Sergei into my niece's presence. I could no more refrain from listening than from eating; the visit was unprecedented and I felt that it meant something more than a mere visit. Was Sergei bringing a message, or had he come on his own account? I was soon to learn, but not from his impassioned exclamations that came, disjointed and incoherent, drifting through the open library door. I was

obliged to wait until Fu had opened the bronze gate and let the chauffeur out again. Then I rushed into the library.

"Portia, what has happened now?" I demanded.

Portia was lying back on the cushions, looking very white but very determined.

"The Princess Tchernova has definitely determined to effect Owen's metamorphosis," she said simply, with what for the moment appeared to me to be an entire lack of feeling, but that I realized afterward was due to strong self-control, forced upon her by the terrible responsibility now resting on her shoulders.

"Portia! Are you crazy?"

"Why, no, Auntie. I'm rather more than ordinarily calm and well balanced," responded my niece. Only her hands, clenched into white-knuckled fists with the intensity of her emotion, betrayed any feeling.

"But, Portia—what are you trying to tell me? It's absurd, ridiculous!" I blustered, suddenly losing all the calm poise with which I had wakened that morning.

"Neither absurd nor ridiculous, Auntie, but very, very real—and very, very terrible!"

"What—what are you going to do about it, Portia?" I faltered. All my lofty common sense had deserted me. I found myself shrinking with the same awful feeling of impotence that I had experienced the night before during my niece's recital of the monstrous things that had happened.

Portia got up out of her cushions slowly. Her eyes were distant, and she did not look directly at me. Her voice sounded as if it came from afar, so little did it appear to issue from her hardly parted lips.

"I must get to work," she said in that far-away manner, as if she were not speaking to me but to someone else, very distant.

"To work?" I cried out. "But aren't you going to warn Owen?"

"To warn him? Oh, I'm going to do more than warn him. I'm going to try to save him if that is humanly —or superhumanly—possible. He wouldn't listen to my warnings, Aunt Sophie. He's under that woman's influence now. I've seen it for days. He—he's not been wearing the flowers I sent him. He's broken his word, and he's been wearing those hideous orchids of hers. He's been dining with her almost every night for the past week. She's been gradually drawing him into her net."

"If you're afraid to warn him, let me!" I cried, rather wildly, and with more than a hint of reproach, I fear, in my tones.

She fixed me with a cold smile.

"Do you really flatter yourself that Owen would listen to what you'd try to tell him, Aunt Sophie, when you hardly know what the truth of the matter is, yourself?" She turned to leave the room. "Better leave things in my hands, dear," she said, more gently.

"Or in God's," I supplemented, rebukingly.

"Yes—in God's," she murmured, lifting her eyes upward as if in silent invocation.

"Why did Sergei tell you about all this?" I demanded.

"Sergei loves the princess. She had promised him that some day his faithful, unquestioned love was to be rewarded. Now he suspects that instead of making him her wolf-mate, she has determined to have Owen. His furious jealousy—oh, he is a man of strong passions!—has been aroused, and he wishes me to interfere—to save Owen, he said, but what he really wishes is my interference, to clear his own path. He tells me that the princess has been trying to administer her strange drinks to Owen during this past week, but that he—Sergei—has managed once or twice to change

the glasses. Not out of consideration for Owen, understand. Sergei would care little if Owen died at the princess' hands during her metamorphosis. It is Owen's life—and Owen's metamorphosis—that Sergei is fighting against."

"And Owen has lent himself to this—this evil experiment?"

"Owen, Sergei tells me, has been reluctant and indifferent to the princess' wiles, but the evil spells are digging their way into his soul. One must flee evil, never stop to play with it. And then, there will be a special conjunction of certain planets in a few nights, with Saturn in the ascendant."

"What has that to do with it?"

She turned from me, saying over her shoulder: "Much, that would take too long to explain. Don't disturb me, dear, will you, until I come to you again? I shall be at work in the laboratory. There is much to do, and only God knows what the outcome of this tragic tangle will be."

"You're not going to—to make incantations—and that kind of thing?" In that moment, I was frankly afraid for her, thinking of her husband's death.

"Auntie, I shall probably make several very dangerous experiments. It is for this that I beg you not to disturb me. Any disturbance might end fatally for me," she warned me gravely.

I promised.

PART 14

Fu carried dinner into the laboratory, but Portia refused it, he told me. Fu was worried about her, but confident in her wisdom.

"Missee make big magic," he told me mysteriously, when I looked disturbedly at the untouched tray.

His smile restored something of my lost tranquillity; if Fu could feel proud and pleased and satisfied at what his mistress was undertaking, then Portia's aunt ought to have a little faith in her, also.

"Missee no can eat now," Fu assured me, with pleased gravity; "bimeby, missee eat. No can make magic if missee eat."

I caught at his meaning then. One drew nearer, Portia had told me, to the spiritual world, when one banished one's consciousness of the body. That is the reason that so many religious sects lay stress upon the mortification of the flesh. Portia did not believe in mortification of the flesh, but she did believe in mastering it. I realized that she was not eating because she did not wish at this crucial juncture to center her thoughts upon anything less than the highest on the spiritual plane. I lost my disturbed feeling and felt a sudden influx of trust and confidence in my niece. Portia knew what she was doing; she had not been Mr. Differdale's pupil and helper for nothing. If there was something wrong going on—and I knew there must be much beneath the surface—Portia understood how to meet that evil with the good that must always conquer, else the world would fall.

I waited, therefore, with what patience I could summon, for my niece to emerge from the laboratory to give me whatever instructions I might need to assist her in saving Owen from the clutches of an evil before which I knew myself, with my limited knowledge of the occult, as helpless as a child. My mind was full of surmises. I thought of the passionate and jealous Sergei, and of the broken, shrinking Agathya with her frightened doglike eyes; I thought of that incarnation of evil beauty called the Princess Irma Tchernova. And last of all, but not least, I thought long of Owen, of the danger in which he stood, and which he so little realized. And after I had thought and thought, without finding any conclusion to my thoughts, I just slipped down upon

my knees and prayed softly and earnestly.

It was while I was praying that Portia came into the library, putting her hand on my shoulder gently as if she was sorry to disturb me. I got up and met her eyes, half ashamed of this disclosure of my inmost self: the soul does not care to be found at its secret devotions. She met my gaze with a kind of proud humility, as if she understood my helplessness, my involuntary confession that I, as a mere human being, was at a loss. I knew when I met her clear gaze that she had learned how to deal with conditions and circumstances before which I, with so many more years of worldly experience, was helpless.

She was dressed in her simple laboratory apron, but there was about her a kind of light that shone through, as if it permeated her entire body and glowed in each cell. It was soft and beautiful, and I felt all at once that she had found something for which I had been seeking ardently for years, something for which the whole world is searching with deep spiritual hunger. I wanted to get nearer to her, to touch her reverently, but at the same time something intangible in her atmosphere kept me at a little distance. I waited for her to speak; I felt that it was not for me to offer suggestions, but for her to give orders that I must obey implicitly, without question.

"Auntie, dear." She spoke with a kind of childish appeal.

I waited expectantly.

"Auntie, I've been at the Princess Tchernova's this evening."

"What?" I cried out in consternation. "Fu told me that you had been shut up all afternoon and evening in the laboratory."

"Well—I was."

"But you just said—?"

"It was my body that was shut up in the laboratory, Auntie. How stupid of me not to think—! You see, I—oh, it's very hard to explain, when you have never read or studied anything about it, Aunt Sophie. Mr. Differdale taught me how to project the astral body consciously—"

"What?"

Well, it was a long explanation and a hard one, and finally Portia had to ask me to take her word for it that it was possible to separate what St. Paul calls "the body and the spirit." I believe he said there was a "fleshly body and a spiritual body", and what I understood from Portia was, that she had learned how to disentangle her spiritual body from her fleshly body, and to travel wherever she chose in that spiritual, or astral body. Of course, it was a new thing to me, consequently hard to understand; I don't fully understand it, even now. But I told her at last to go ahead with whatever she had learned, while away in her astral body; that I'd try to understand.

She said she'd been inside the Princess Tchernova's house, invisible, unheard. The princess was giving a special dinner for Owen. Owen had been wearing a strange red flower in his buttonhole, a flower that resembled an ox-eye daisy, but with a thick, fleshy stem and a faint, sickish odor. The whole dining room was crowded with marigolds, azaleas, and lilies of the valley, and the heavy combined scent hung stagnant upon the close air. The fragrance that Owen had once considered disagreeable, he was now indifferent to, for when the princess broke off a marigold and offered it to him with a searching look, he took the odorous yellow bloom and held it to his nostrils almost with enjoyment.

Then the princess had lifted an embroidered linen cloth from a tabouret and had taken up two woven chains of those hideously loathsome growths that she called orchids. One she

placed about her own neck, where it swung nearly to her knees; the other she flung about the neck of her favored guest.

"She has bewitched Owen, Auntie. He doesn't realize what it all means. He—he even kissed her hand—that terrible hand!—when she stretched it out to him like a queen to a captive slave. And then she flung herself into his arms and told him that she loved him with a reckless passion, and that the stars had marked him out as her future lover, her future husband. Oh, it was cruelly hard to see and hear all this, and know that for the time being I could do nothing!"

She continued in her story, with a calmness that I envied her. I felt that she was being buoyed up by something which she had not yet told me, and all I could do was to wait with impatience.

Owen had kissed the princess' slim hand—and then he began to reach for her red lips, always with a kind of strange apathy—but then she pushed him gently away and led him to the table, where stood a great flagon of that strangely sparkling water, to drink which means the doom of a man's soul under the curse of lycanthropy. She poured out two brimming goblets and offered him one while she drained the other, in symbol of their coming marriage, which she averred should be celebrated in real Russian fashion.

A circle of seven feet in diameter and another of three feet within the first, she drew with a bit of chalk and a long cord. In the central circle she placed a brazier over which swung a pot with some spring water and certain herbs (the names of these Portia observed were in her books and therefore unnecessary to enumerate, and I particularly refrain now from writing them down, for the reason that those who know, know; and those who do not and want to, probably ought not to know). The princess made certain passes about Owen, who remained as if hypnotized, his eyes fixed upon his enchantress. Then when the liquid boiled, she dipped a branch of parsley into it, and flung the hot decoction dripping over him, crying aloud certain words in Russian as she did so.

At that, Portia's concentrated strength of will deserted her; she could no longer contain her emotion. She tried to throw herself between that embodied evil and that man who was loved to his own doom, and found herself waking back in her home, merged once more into the heavy body of flesh from which for a short time she had contrived to free herself.

"How could you bear it?" I cried to her then. "How can you stand here and tell me all this so calmly? Is your heart a piece of ice, Portia?"

"No, not ice, Auntie. You see, I am trusting in higher powers than those powers of evil. I have—an assurance—that everything will come out right. We must be patient. Tomorrow, when I can manage to get in touch with Owen, I shall have him come here, and then I shall take the necessary steps—"

"Then you know how to free him from the spell?"

"I know what can be attempted, dear. But the outcome is always on the knees of the gods."

A long, rushing sound all at once swelled out, filling our ears with ominous, rumbling thunder. I caught at Portia's arm in terror.

"What is that?"

Her great, serious eyes dilated. Her other hand went involuntarily to her breast as if to quiet the beating of her heart. And then came the explosion. We were rooted to the spot with the awful terror of that unknown catastrophe.

"MISSEE! Missee! Plincess house go to sky!"

It was Fu who came running to apprize us of the thing that had happened. We ran upstairs without need of touching the electric switch that controlled the hall lights, for a blaze of red and yellow poured through the windows, announcing the catastrophe before we could see it. From the windows of Portia's room, which faced the west, we two women saw the tremendous volume of flame and billowing black smoke that roared and swirled skyward from what had been the old Burnham house; then we turned our pallid faces to each other.

"Better so, Portia, my own dear girl! Better so—than that other!" I cried out.

Portia gave a little moan, and stepped back weakly against my outstretched arms. I folded her closely to me. It was, after all, for the best. If what she had told me was true, it was far, far better that Owen should have died suddenly in that explosion than that he should have lived under the curse of lycanthropy, and at the beck and call of that evil thing that possessed and animated the body of the Russian princess.

Portia stirred in my arms finally, at the sound that came loudly across the fields, of fire-engines with their clanging and their sirens. She put me gently aside and once more turned to look from the window. For a few minutes she stood there without speaking, her eyes fixed on that blazing funeral pyre. Then she drew a long breath, lifting her eyes upward as if in search of power to resign herself to the inevitable.

"I'm going down into the laboratory," she began, when I clutched at her again, nervously. The gate-bell had rung loudly, an alarm that conveyed a sense of agitation to my jangled nerves.

She sprang away from my extended hand and went down the hall, down the stairway, before I could gather my scattered wits sufficiently to follow. Then I heard her cry out.

"Agathya!" And then, "No! No! Owen! *Owen!*"

NOTWITHSTANDING my age and my clinging skirts, I managed to get to the top of the staircase in double-quick time. I looked down. At the foot of the stairs stood Agathya, holding a great gray dog on a leash. Kneeling on the floor, arms about the beast's neck, was my niece Portia, uttering little cries whose import I could not understand. Agathya, I could see, had been crying; her face was streaked with tears, and her eyes were red and swollen. What had brought her here? Why the gray dog? I hurried down.

"Owen has been saved!" cried Portia.

I knew that she was addressing me, although she did not rise from her knees, and continued to caress the gray dog that stood passively as if frightened.

"Where is he?" I looked about but did not see him.

And then the dumb Agathya pointed, her trembling finger indicating—. Why, no, it was impossible! The gray dog—! Was it a dog? Was it not, rather—?

Then I screamed.

"Portia! Let it alone! Get away from it! Let it alone! It isn't a dog!" My voice rose to a frantic shriek. "It's—a—*wolf!*"

Portia did not rise. She continued to stroke the beast's head behind the ears that pricked slightly forward as if the animal were listening, puzzled, to our conversation.

"I know what it is, Auntie. Don't frighten it, please. It isn't really a wolf. It is—Owen!"

And at that plain statement I understood. But the understanding was too much for me. The blood rushed hotly up into my head; I felt

blackness swooping down upon me from every side. I clutched dizzily at the stair-rail.

"Oh! So—it—is—Owen!" I heard my voice saying, as if from some great distance. Then I knew no more.

When I came back to consciousness, I was lying on my own cushions in my own room, and Agathya was squatting on the floor beside me. The old woman was crying softly and plaintively.

PART 15

ALTHOUGH it was not for days afterward that I myself learned the story of Owen's metamorphosis, and the fate of the Princess Irma Tchernova and her devoted chauffeur, chronologically it ought to have gone into this recital of acts before Portia and I stood at the window that night, watching the holocaust of what had been one of the fine old landmarks of Meadowlawn. Agathya's inability to speak even her native language might have proved a serious impediment to our acquiring knowledge of what took place at the old Burnham house before the explosion, had not the old woman been fairly gifted with her pencil in the manner of crude drawings, and had she not possessed sufficient histrionic ability to combine with those rough sketches. Her own system for conveying ideas to her mistress or Sergei helped us but little.

Afterward, she partly drew, partly acted out, the happenings of that night, until Portia and I understood very well what had taken place. Her story was fully corroborated from Owen's angle, later, although his recollection of what took place was dim, as if his mind had not been absolutely clear at the time. It would be entirely too tedious if I tried to tell the whole story of Agathya's attempts to impart her knowledge of that last terrible night, and I think it will be better if I tell it as if I had witnessed the whole tragedy in person.

Agathya managed to make us understand that she had been foster-mother to the princess when Irma was a baby, hence something more than a serf, but that Irma had always treated her nurse as an unscrupulous person is likely to treat a person who loves one. It was not until Irma had gone far in the ways of evil knowledge that Agathya lost her tongue, and she lost it because she had seen fit to rebuke her mistress for cruel treatment of some small animal upon which the princess had been making experiments. The princess' retaliation for this reproach was frightful, but it meant Agathya's future silence, and Agathya's shrinking, fearful service from that time on. What Irma Tchernova failed to understand was that some day her ancient servitor would turn upon such a tyrannical mistress, her love changed to implacable hatred.

When the princess had completed the experiments in black magic that made it possible for her to metamorphose at will, she had yet another hold upon her terrified old nurse; she told Agathya that if she could not find victims upon whom to glut her appetite for human flesh, she would rend the old woman limb from limb in lieu of other prey. This threat was sufficient in itself to bind the broken-spirited Agathya, who no longer dared oppose her mistress in anything.

This condition was taken full advantage of by the princess, who often slaked her thirst for blood, when she was angry, by forcing Agathya to bare her back to the knout, which the Russian would wield until crimson followed her blows. Sometimes after this she would relent, and weep, begging her old nurse's pardon. This had taken place several times, and Agathya alternately found herself swayed between her old love for her one-time foster-child, and her cringing fear of the terrible beatings she

might expect to receive upon what was too often a slight provocation.

On the night of the fire, Agathya had received orders to prepare a more than ordinarily splendid dinner. The heavy brocaded draperies were drawn close across the windows by the hands of the princess herself, intent upon privacy. Irma dressed with more than her customary attention, decking herself with many-colored jeweled ornaments to accentuate her exotic beauty. She wore a corsage bouquet of lycanthropic flowers of various colors, ranging from the deep orange with puffy black blotches, to sickly white or palish blue or ugly garnet. The brazier, of which Portia had told me, was prepared, and its contents carefully measured, ready for use in the incantations. The wreaths or chains of those terrible "orchids" were tied together by the princess' own slender fingers and laid under an embroidered linen cover on a small table in the dining room.

Agathya had her suspicions as to the event that her mistress was preparing for, and when Sergei, attired for the affair with barbaric splendor in robes of rich embroidery after the ancient Russian fashion, appeared in the kitchen to see to the final arrangements, the old woman inquired of her fellow-servant by means of deaf-and-dumb signs if the guest were not to be Owen Edwardes, and if the occasion were not to be Owen's initiation into the lycanthropic rites that would result in his metamorphosis. It was a matter not to be ignored between Sergei and Agathya, for the old woman knew how madly the chauffeur loved his mistress; knew that he had followed the princess chiefly because of his wild passion, not because he had been born to service, for it seems that in Russia he had been a small nobleman.

"Tonight the princess intends to make Ow-een her mate," he snarled between shut teeth. "Yes, tonight she will make a grand foray somewhere in the neighborhood, with a partner, a mate, at her side. She wishes to glut her hunger in company with the man whom she loves. Well, she reckons without me. She has lied to me once too often, Agathya."

He laughed. It made Agathya shudder, for it was a fearful sound, mirthless and grim, that issued from his lips.

"Tonight is to be her night of love. It shall be! It shall be such love as that pale American could never dream of. Even our princess does not know of the love that is in store for her tonight. Oh, my time has come. I shall wait no longer. She shall be mine—or no man's."

"What are you going to do?" Agathya's nimble fingers demanded, while the old woman's eyes dilated with apprehension for her fellow-servant, who had more than once saved her from the princess' knout. "If you offend her, your chance to win her for yourself will be gone forever. This may be only a passing fancy for the American."

"A passing fancy? When she intends to make him her lycanthropic mate?" Sergei demanded savagely. "Tonight she will either make me her wolf-mate or slay that interloper when she metamorphoses. I have waited too long. My patience is exhausted. The hour has come when I must act."

Agathya trembled. "Why should she kill that poor young man?" she questioned. Agathya was afflicted by pity for Owen, and sympathy for Portia, who had once laid a gentle hand upon that wounded shoulder.

Sergei stared at the old woman.

"If the princess chooses me, then I will spare the young man. If you want his life, Agathya, it is yours, provided only that the American woman takes him away from here, If

the princess will not fulfil her promises to me—tonight—" . . .

His unspoken words conveyed to Agathya eloquently all that his lips did not utter.

The old woman went on with her dinner preparations, and Sergei with his dignified serving when dinner was ready. But when the table had been cleared and the princess was left alone with Owen, Sergei was not outside the door; Sergei was standing within the room, behind the heavy draperies near the door, which he had closed cunningly, as he concealed himself. And Sergei's hand was on the hilt of his keen-bladed knife, the knife with the enameled Russian hilt that had looked so colorful against his dark mantle.

What Portia had seen, Sergei saw, with the difference that when the princess flung over Owen the hot drops of the decoction from the pot that hung over the brazier, Sergei saw the thing take place that to him meant Irma Tchernova's betrayal of himself, her acceptance of another man as her mate. Sergei saw the metamorphosis of Owen Edwardes take place before his furious eyes; saw all—all. He was not horrified; he had known for years that the princess was subject to this supernormal change. What he felt was bitter anger at her betrayal of him, furious jealousy at that signal instance of her favor for Owen, and a powerful desire for revenge upon that lovely, lying creature who had beguiled another and innocent man by her magical arts.

The gray wolf that stood within the double circle beside the glowing brazier trembled as if with fright. Sergei read the creature's mood and disposition aright, and a sudden impulse arose within him to snatch the unfortunate beast out of the triumphant princess' power, before that gray muzzle should be stained with innocent blood. His opportunity was not long in coming. For a moment the beautiful Russian stood caressing the rough gray hide of the beast beside her, with incoherent endearments, and an occasional passionate kiss. Then she lifted both slender arms in invocation. As she raised her face upward, Sergei snatched off his long girdle and knotted one end into a running noose.

Very quietly he tiptoed up behind the princess. He dropped the noose about the gray wolf's neck and pulled the animal toward the door. It was all done so quickly—and the beast went with him as if it understood—that when the princess heard the first sound and whirled about, it was too late for her to change the invocation she had already made. That white face was growing elongated—those beryl eyes gleamed with garnet fires—as Sergei pulled the gray wolf out into the hall and closed the door behind him.

He called to the old nurse, who was crouching near the door.

"Here!" He put the knotted girdle into the old woman's trembling hand. "Here is the man you wanted to save. Take him to the American woman who loves him. Do not be afraid. Our mistress will not be able to harm you from now on. *I* am master, Agathya."

Agathya remained rooted to the spot, her terrified mouth agape. She was unable to question Sergei by her own methods, for her hands were busy with the gray wolf that had been delivered into her keeping. She could only stand, staring, petrified.

"Go! And go quickly!" commanded Sergei, authoritatively. "Already our mistress has changed her form, and she must not find you are here, with this beast—so. Do not think of me. I shall be able to take care both of myself—and her. Go!"

Agathya, accustomed throughout her sixty-odd years to unquestioning obedience, trudged out of the house, drawing the trembling gray wolf with

her. She admitted when telling her story that she did not once entertain a fear of the animal, knowing it as she did for a kindly and well-intentioned human being before its metamorphosis. She had been afraid of her mistress when the princess changed her form, and usually kept to her room at night, warned to do so, "in case of accident", as Irma had dryly remarked.

Agathya, however, could not force herself to go away immediately across the fields to the Differdale house, without seeing for herself—if she could do so in safety—what was taking place between her mistress and the enraged Sergei. Therefore, when she had closed the house door securely behind her, she dragged the unwilling beast along with her to where she could peer in at the high windows of the dining room. She found a place at last, where the princess' hand had not drawn the curtains together sufficiently, or where Sergei had disarranged them later inadvertently.

Through the panes her white face peered. At the end of the improvised leash the unwilling beast tugged and strained. Agathya was really terrified beyond expression at her realization that conditions had gone entirely beyond the Princess Tchernova's control and had passed into the hands of the rebellious Sergei. She stood staring into the room, terror in her heart at what she felt intuitively was about to take place, for she knew that the princess would not overlook Sergei's interference.

WITHIN the brilliantly lighted salon there paced back and forth a great white wolf, an animal that the old woman knew only too well. The bushy tail switched angrily. The great beast leapt, and flung itself furiously at the closed door once, twice, then fumbled at the knob with paws and mouth; a horrifying sight, somehow, even to Agathya. At last it gave up, walked back to the center of the room and crouched, facing the door.

Presently that watched door opened cautiously, to admit Sergei, who closed it quickly behind him, with his back against it, his intention clarified by that simple action. The white wolf drew back with a suspicious snarl. It must have seen, as did Agathya, the glittering, keen-bladed knife that shone in the chauffeur's right hand. Apparently the wolf was uncertain what to do; it stood, lashing its furry sides with its tail, eying Sergei with glowing red eyes that were terrible to see.

"You promised me, Irma Andreyevna!" cried out Sergei finally, with concentrated passion. "You lied to me, didn't you? You were always lying to me, because your promises bound me to your service. Well, you've lied once too often, Irma Andreyevna. You promised me to perform the incantations over me that would make me your mate—but now you have thrust me to one side to make place for that pale American, who does not love you—*who does not love you,* princess! No, what he gives is only the reflection of your own abandoned, mad passion, an echo of your magic arts drawn out of him in response to your desire.

"You thought you could play with Sergei's heart, didn't you? Ah, you didn't know Sergei as well as you thought you did! You've played with him for the last time. You've told him your last lie. You are going to keep your promises tonight, and lie on Sergei's breast—alive or dead!" And he laughed.

At that laugh, a low growl rippled out of the parted jaws of the white wolf. The red eyes glowed savagely. It swayed from side to side, then crouched with tense muscles.

Sergei braced himself against the door, the knife in his hand flashing back the light of the cut-glass pend-

ants of the chandelier. There was a sudden eclipse of the lights, as a long, lithe body intervened between Agathya's staring eyes and the chandelier, in a curving spring. Sergei cried out, as if taken by surprize, flinging his right hand into the air. The knife flashed in that upward sweep.

In her tense condition, Agathya could have sworn that she heard the loud snap of the white wolf's teeth as they met in the empty air, and she breathed in relief, a relief that a second later turned into agonized suspense—for which of the two within she herself could hardly have told. Remember, Agathya had nursed at her own breast the *thing* that raged within that room. It was truly a horrid sound, followed by a kind of gasping, choking, husky laugh—if laugh it could be called—from Sergei.

Agathya looked. Looked again, hardly believing her own eyes. Sergei was holding the white wolf's ugly snapping jaws close to his bleeding breast, as if in an ecstasy. His mouth was wide open, his head lifted as if he felt an emotion too deep even for joy. He panted as he pressed the bared, red-stained fangs against his very heart with his muscular left arm.

"I told you—you are lying on my heart—my bleeding heart—alive—my princess—alive!"

He raised the knife yet higher. It described a flashing arc in the air. It disappeared to the hilt in the white wolf's side. A fearful howl wailed out upon Agathya's ears.

AGATHYA knew—what Russian peasant would not have known?—what would follow. Nevertheless, she stared with bulging eyes at the spectacle that took place within the room. It seemed hardly a second before Sergei held against his lacerated breast the pallid blood-stained face of the Princess Irma Andreyevna Tchernova. He held her so tightly that she could not even struggle, and all the time he laughed terribly, with exultant triumph.

"Mine! Did I not tell you so, my princess? Mine! You would not keep your promise, so I had to make you. Mine! Mine! No one can take you away from me now!"

And indeed, no one could. For even as he cried out, Agathya's staring eyes saw the supple form of her mistress shiver convulsively, then droop limply.

Sergei held the slender figure from him for a moment, and read the unmistakable sign on that pallid face. He carried the relaxed form to a pile of cushions at the center of the room and laid it tenderly down upon the rich velvets and silks, disposing it as gently as if life still dwelt in those white limbs. Then he took out a white handkerchief and made as if to wipe the red stains from that white face.

His hand jerked back; he shook his head. He would leave his blood upon the countenance of the woman he loved. Who can say what his secret thought was, the significance that action held for him? He left her there, and went out of the room.

Still Agathya could not move. She felt that there was more to follow, much more, and that she had to know what it was. She pressed her wrinkled old face against the window-pane, and held tightly to the leash of the animal which she had in charge. The poor beast cowered against her as if in mortal dread.

The door opened, and Sergei entered, both hands full. He was carrying cans from the garage, which was built in under that side of the house. He walked about the room, pouring gasoline generously over the rich rugs, the heaped-up cushions. When he had emptied the cans, he went back to the center of the room and leaned over the jewel-bedecked form lying there.

He sobbed. He cried. He knelt beside the dead woman and kissed her limp hands passionately. He begged for her forgiveness. He railed against her unfaithfulness. Agathya drew back with a shuddering intake of her breath; her own tears welled up and blinded her eyes.

At last Sergei took a match-box from his pocket and began to strike matches. When they were well ablaze, he flung them on all sides about him.

Hardly had Agathya time to withdraw from the window before the entire room was a blazing inferno. As she staggered away, dragging the gray wolf, the night became lighted by the towering flames that licked their rapid way through the Tchernova residence. The tugging beast at her side pulled in terrified shudders on the embroidered girdle of the doomed Sergei.

One final picture had burned itself into Agathya's very soul. And that was Sergei, standing in the midst of those leaping, roaring flames, his lacerated breast bared, his great arms holding against his bleeding heart the white body of the woman he had loved.

Then Agathya remembered that almost directly under the dining room the garage, with its plentiful stores of gasoline, was situated. When she remembered this, she started to run, pulling the gray wolf with her. Hardly had she reached a safe distance when there came a long rumbling that ended in a roar; the flames had reached the store of gasoline in the garage. When the explosion came, Agathya was thrown to the ground by the shock, and recovered her footing with difficulty, for she was badly shaken.

But throughout it all she held grimly to the girdle at the other end of which pulled the terrified beast which she must not desert, which she must deliver into the right hands at whatever cost to herself. But she turned at the sound of that rumble, that fierce crash, to see the chaos of brilliant and ruthless flame sweeping upward to the very stars at the impetus of that stored gasoline. The Tchernova house had gone, wiped off the face of the earth, and with it had gone Sergei, and the Princess Irma Tchernova, who had lain in her lover's arms only when death had claimed them both.

Close upon the heels of the explosion, Agathya came ringing the bell of the bronze gate, to deliver into the hands of Portia Differdale that most precious and terrible of gifts which she held captive on the girdle of the dead, but triumphant, Sergei.

PART 16

When I wakened out of my stupid fainting spell and opened my eyes to see the face of Agathya, the truth swept over me again and for a few minutes I could not get the strength to lift my head from the cushions. The old woman had received her orders, apparently, for when she saw my eyes open she rang for Fu, who peered in at the open doorway, smiling cheerily at sight of my questioning gaze.

"Fu call Missee," exclaimed he, disappearing as quickly as he had come.

By the time I had recovered sufficiently to sit up, Portia came in at the doorway and knelt beside me.

"Auntie dear! Forgive me if I didn't stay with you myself, but I knew it was only a fainting spell, and I—"

"You had something more important to attend to," I ventured, dryly, at which my niece's face went rose-color.

I grasped her wrists and whispered somewhat fiercely, I fear, for I had grown very fond of Owen during the weeks of my stay in Meadowlawn: "Owen? Will he always be—that way?"

She did not need my words to acquaint her with my anxiety.

"Don't worry, dear. Everything will soon be all right, Auntie. He—it—is down in the laboratory, where I am preparing for what must be done."

"But, Portia—?"

"There must be an exorcism, and counteracting spells, and I must wait until about 2 o'clock this morning before I can begin them, on account of certain conjunctions of the planets, which will be more favorable at that moment."

"You are sure you can do everything without danger to yourself?"

Her face clouded.

"I do not know. But I am willing to give my own life to save Owen," she whispered. Then, "Auntie, if anything happens to me, you must see to it that Owen"—her voice dropped—"that Owen does—not—live—after me."

"Portia!"

"This is imperative. Can't you see why? If I am taken away, and he lives on, with this terrible thing upon him—"

I understood then.

"But if you are successful—?"

"If I am, he will never have this thing come upon him again. You must remember, it was not called upon him by his own evil desires; it was against his conscious will. That changes everything."

I did not pursue the matter farther. Portia probably would not, could not, have told me what my curiosity was inflamed to learn. She remained with me for a few minutes, then went back to the laboratory to prepare for her work.

I got out some of the books we had been consulting those last few days, and read them eagerly, gathering bits of information here and there. What I garnered led me to believe that an attitude of prayer would be the best thing to help my dear niece and poor Owen, so while Agathya watched beside me in the library, I closed my eyes occasionally and let my soul rise in supplication to the Highest Power of all.

Fu padded into the room, and with a deep obeisance, departed. I surprized his comprehending expression, however, and when I later learned that he had spent much of the night before his statue of Confucius, I was grateful. I believe firmly that faithful prayer, whether directed to God in the name of Confucius, or God in the name of the Carpenter, reaches the ear of the Infinite, and releases the God-power that works out so-called miracles.

I expected some kind of supernormal demonstration and was not far wrong. When 2 o'clock struck, I felt impelled to pray constantly for Portia's success and her escape from the perils that I knew she was surrounded by. Agathya, watching me, suddenly flung herself down upon her old knees and burst out into impassioned, guttural sounds; I knew that she was praying, too, in her poor dumb fashion.

Just what went on in the laboratory, I have never asked Portia, for I did not care, afterward, to bring up memories of that terrible time. I know now that she must have had a frightful struggle with the evil influences that had been called by her to undo their evil work in metamorphosing poor Owen. The minutes did drag, that night.

I felt that something awful was hanging over us, as I listened to Agathya's strange, uncouth noises break in upon an otherwise undisturbed silence that weighed upon my very soul. At half past 2 I opened my eyes with a start, sure that someone, or something, had entered the room with a rush of cold air, but my hasty glance reassured me; we were apparently alone. Yet I did not feel

that we were alone. A cold shiver of repulsion went over me. I knew all at once that something inimical was with us, knew it with other senses than those of the body. I sat up straight among the cushions, put the palms of my hands together, and prayed aloud with such fervor as I had never before known.

Portia told me afterward, that at what she judged must have been this hour, she was granted a moment's respite—which she sorely needed—in her battle with that Evil that fought against her for Owen Edwardes' soul. And she knew, somehow, that it was my prayer that had lifted the terrible cloud of Evil from about her, to give her that moment's resting space.

Meantime, as I prayed, something out of the thin air struck at my two hands and forced them down and apart! I cried out. Agathya stopped her strange sounds for a single moment to stare appalled at me, then she began gibbering once more in that awful fashion, seemingly in the last throes of mortal fear. The sight of her groveling on the floor and crying out so horribly, stiffened my Yankee backbone. I forced my two hands together again and held them tightly to my breast, inwardly defying any power inimical to make me cease from my supplications. Nor was I disturbed again. The curtains at the doorway swung and swayed, as if something had passed through with a rush, and the atmosphere of the room became friendly, as it were, once more.

I became aware that a storm was raging. The wind howled and shrieked about the house, beating upon the solid granite as if to tear the blocks apart. In the intervals of the constantly rising gale Agathya's horrible mouthings rose on the night, making it yet more terrible.

Despite it all, I felt strongly impelled to put all thoughts out of my mind save those of prayer, and it is strange that not for a single minute did I doubt Portia's ability to cope with whatever evil stalked abroad that awful night. Not for an instant did I even contemplate going to her assistance; I felt assurance within my heart that I could do more for her by my simple supplication than by my physical presence, ignorant as I was of the occult forces that had been loosed that night.

It must have been about 3 o'clock when I heard the storm die down magically, as if calmed by the command of some Mighty One. Shortly afterward I heard the sound of an opening door below, and then voices. Voices—one of them masculine! I dared not stop my prayers, nor did Agathya cease her gabbling noises. When Portia came to the door of the library, she found us both earnestly engaged in supplication, each in her own fashion.

"Auntie!"

At that happy voice I stopped and dared look toward the door. Portia stood there, leaning on Owen's arm, her face shining with a kind of inward light. Owen withdrew his arm and came toward me, very white but very uplifted.

"God bless you for what you've done tonight, Aunt Sophie," he said to me, reaching out to lift me to my feet. He held me against his heart as if I had been his mother, and kissed me warmly several times.

I could hardly gather my scattered wits. Then, too, I was exhausted by the strain I had been through. I broke down and cried like a child, my head on Owen's shoulder and Portia's arms about us both.

Fu, always ready for an emergency, had prepared a cold supper. He called us from the door, his yellow face ashine as if he, too, had experienced something out of the ordinary. We all went into the dining room and ate like starved things. Agathya re-

fused to sit at the table with us and went into the kitchen with Fu; we could hear him talking to her in a cheerful monologue, and her occasional guttural attempt at speech.

I asked no questions. It did not seem a time for questions. It was a time for rejoicing, and I saw from Portia's air that she was no longer carrying a heavy spiritual burden. Owen was very quiet and subdued, much unlike his usual light-hearted self, but the looks he gave Portia every now and then turned my old heart to water with their tenderness.

I insisted that he remain with us the rest of the night, so later we sat and talked—not of the past but of the future.

They had decided to marry the next day, in spite of what people might say to a hasty wedding following close upon the death of Mr. Differdale. The harrowing experience the two had recently undergone had given them clearer vision; they cared nothing for the opinions of outsiders. Their own souls were light and free with the knowledge that they were doing right in taking the step.

So they were married the next morning, Portia and Owen.

PART 17

THAT they were superlatively happy it is superfluous to say. They insisted that I continue to make my home with them. Portia told me that if it had not been for my prayers she would have succumbed, that last awful night, to the evil powers arrayed against her overwhelmingly, augmented as they were by the subtle mind of the liberated Princess Tchernova. Just when she felt herself failing, of a sudden she had heard my voice praying, and confidence grew strong within her that she would conquer. Fresh courage and strength imbued her efforts, and she held out to the end, the end when Owen resumed his natural form and became once more master of himself. Both she and Owen made me feel that they owed so much to me that they could never repay me, and wished to have me always near them.

We were a happy household. One thing only disturbed me, and this was that Owen became much interested in Mr. Differdale's notes on his work, and began delving into the books so absorbedly that after a few months I was not surprized that he and Portia should take up together the work which my niece had thought to lay aside. The importance of it could not be denied, yet the dangers for them both—. Well, after all, everybody has to live his own life and die his own death.

It was their knowledge of the underlying spiritual causes for the world conflict that led both my dear ones to give their services to their country when we entered the war. Before they went abroad—Owen as an officer and Portia as a nurse—they made over to me all their property, knowing that in case of their deaths I would use it well, as Portia expressed it.

Fu Sing and Agathya served me well during those years, two years that were a harrowing ordeal to me, for my heart was bound up in my dear children. When the news of their deaths came, it found me nursing the old Russian woman on what proved to be her death-bed. Oh, it was as well that I had my hands full of work those days; or how could I have borne it all?

Shortly after Agathya's death Fu was called to China. His filial affection had been appealed to; his old father lying sick desired to see his son before he died. In this way I was desolate and alone; my dear ones taken from me, and those other two who made links with the past, as well.

Mrs. Differdale and Aurora Arnold tried to drop in on me frequently, but

I had to discourage their visits; they were so full of neighborhood gossip and the pettinesses of life, that they always left me feeling out of kilter with the world. After a time I found myself entirely alone with my memories, memories both painful and beautiful. It was about this time, while I was so alone, that I began to feel strongly impelled to writing out the experience of that terrible winter.

I did not even try to engage a servant, because I could take care of the house very well myself and the work helped me to keep occupied: it is wise for one who has no real object in life to be busy always. I read a great deal, much that I could not really understand, in Mr. Differdale's books. The reading filled in hours that would otherwise have been unpleasantly empty. And somehow, the more I read and studied, the more I felt impelled to write the story of my experience.

And so at last I started to write down what I remembered of it as best I could, believing that there were those in America who ought to know of that invasion from the dark, with its threat that what has happened once may occur again. It has taken me several months to write these few thousand words, because I have been somehow hindered and have had obstacles thrown in my way, time and time again. I do not believe these hindrances are coincidences; I believe something quite the contrary.

The things that have happened to prevent me from writing have all been explicable from the standpoint of everyday life, I admit. The fact remains that I have had to fight against interruptions ever since I started to write this account. I had what the doctor called ptomaine poisoning, and had to lie weeks in bed with a trained nurse in attendance, so that afterward I was obliged to fight for sufficient strength to be permitted to use my pen. I have found my telephone connections so strangely broken or unsatisfactory that day after day I was obliged to go out in person to order provisions. Frequently the grocer could not get my order to me and I had to go out for it myself. Always there was a new complication, explicable on perfectly sound material grounds, but resulting in the same thing invariably, i. e., my physical inability to write or impossibility to find time to write.

But now—at last—I have completed my work. I have written to several prominent publishers of fiction magazines, asking them to send me the names and addresses of those of their contributors who, in their opinion, know most about occult matters. I have selected one of these writers and have written her. She is to call here and receive this manuscript, and see to it that it is published and its warning message spread broadcast.

Today is the day she is to come. I shall wrap my manuscript carefully in oiled paper and lock it into a stout metal box. Neither fire nor water must find their way to it. That there will be attempts made to destroy it, I know, but while I live I shall guard it with my life, and I know that the woman whom I have called to take it in charge realizes to the full the gravity of the message and will carry out my wishes in regard to it.

Sophie Delorme.

Differdale House,
June 18th, 1924.

[The End.]

Note.—The earlier installments of Miss Delorme's remarkable narrative, with a foreword by Greye La Spina, were published in the April and May numbers of WEIRD TALES. Copies will be mailed to any address by the publishers for 25 cents each.

LOO TUN SIN

By EVERETT BOSTON

LOO TUN SIN, wizard of the East, man of the West; Loo Tun Sin, whose face has never been seen, even by his seven wives; of him, of Loo Tun Sin, I would tell a tale. Let the babbling of voices and the rattle of laughter cease while I tell of Loo Tun Sin.

Now a house of Loo Tun Sin had been entered in his absence, and a woman of Loo Tun Sin had been betrayed by force. And the word ran through the silent street of the warehouses, out into the yellow lights of the chop suey district, up well-lighted stairs of marble, into gay restaurants, down dark, odorous wooden stairs, and into alleys. Presently it came to the door of the Forbidden Room.

Because he was the master, none dared disturb him, but they waited in the hall by the door of the Forbidden Room until he came out.

"O, Loo Tun Sin!" they cried; "your house has been defiled, and a woman has known shame!

Loo Tun Sin drew himself erect, and replied: "Who has entered my house, and which house is it?"

"The house in the street before the wharves," they answered.

"It is well!" he said, as if to children. "But who?"

"Oh, Loo Tun Sin, it was a man with a terrible face, who is not of our people. He is known as the Shark among his people, who are gunmen."

"It is well!" he said again. "Send the youngest of the hatchetmen of the Soo tong to me at the House of Painted Colors."

"It shall be done, O Loo Tun Sin!"

The front of the house was a store that held tea and carvings and an old Chinaman. Behind the store was the abode that was known as the House of Painted Colors. Here sat Loo Tun Sin with his head bowed in a great shame. His house had been defiled, and his vengeance must be unique, as it would be swift.

Then a woman was brought before him, wailing and praying for death, since she had been robbed of her virtue in the sight of her husband. To her Loo Tun Sin showed a picture and asked a question, and she answered, "Yes! It was that man!"

"Death is a flower blooming in the night wind," said Loo Tun Sin. "Virtue departed may not return. Here is a rosebud, pleasant to the smell. When life wearies you, inhale the odor of the rosebud, and your death will be as a sweet sleep."

Then the woman left him, wailing softly that she must die, but Loo Tun Sin only stared at the picture of the Shark.

The face of the Shark was horrible to contemplate. The nose was huge, and the forehead and chin retreating. Protruding teeth gave the face all it needed to resemble the head of a shark. It was said that this ugliness gave him an advantage in his battles with the police and other gunmen.

And he had been heard to say that a Chinaman was lower than a dog, and should be treated as such.

Loo Tun Sin smiled under his mask as he thought of this last. And he murmured, "Death brings oblivion. That shall not be my vengeance." Then he picked up a book, and read it with great interest.

INTO the store before the House of Painted Colors came a young Chinaman who was dressed in tailor-

made clothing and who smoked expensive Egyptian cigarettes. Through the store and to the door of the House of Painted Colors he went, but before he could knock the door opened.

"It is well!" said Loo Tun Sin. "You are Billy Soo before the missionary. Mine is not a tong business, nor is it of murder. But it requires skill, therefore I shall pay whatever it may be worth."

"The sun warms again," said Billy Soo politely. "I should not like to kill just now. My payment shall be to serve the master, Loo Tun Sin."

"The moon was silver, as a maiden's heart, but the dawn destroyed the beauty of the moon. I would cloud the dawn with trouble. Bring him I speak of before me. The moon is no longer of value, but I would have the dawn. Be swift!"

Out of the store before the House of Painted Colors swaggered a young Chinaman whose step was unhurried and who paused to light a cigarette. People passed this way and that, and the young Chinaman mingled with them and was gone.

In the House of Painted Colors Loo Tun Sin turned again to his book, but presently rang a bell. A lean, humble Chinaman of the coolie class answered.

"Is she dead?" asked Loo Tun Sin.

"She is dead, O Loo Tun Sin!"

"You will remove all food from the cold box of the foreigners and place her there. It is a part of my vengeance."

"It shall be done!"

Again Loo Tun Sin turned to his book, and sometimes he pondered on a passage. It was an interesting book.

The sun that had risen on morning descended on night and a tall clock was brought to the store of Loo Tun Sin. Four chattering Chinamen carried it. Paddy the Cop stopped to watch for a moment, then moved on.

Presently a large trunk came from the store and was carried to the door of the Forbidden Room, which was over the chop suey restaurant of Henry Soo.

In the restaurant below the Forbidden Room sat seven gunmen, well-dressed, manicured, and cold-eyed. They spoke of one known as the Shark.

"—went fooling with a yaller belly's woman!"

"Had a yaller woman, onct!"

"Shut up!" said the leader. "She was a high class dame, see! And she belonged to"—he bent closer and lowered his voice—"to Loo Tun Sin!"

"Hell!"

So they sat very still and drank hot tea in cold silence, for the name of Loo Tun Sin was known to them.

"I hear they cut you up, bit by bit, unless you buy the woman first," whispered one, but the others did not answer, only staring stonily at the table cloth.

"The Shark was of the gang," said the leader, after a time. "*He's* got a room upstairs. The Shark's gone. *He's* got 'um!"

So they looked at one another without speaking, and finished their tea and went up the stairs to the Forbidden Room.

Beside the door of the Forbidden Room were ten Chinamen with impassive faces but wary eyes. Each wore a blouse with wide sleeves, and each kept his hands in his sleeves. There was no hostile move. There was no need of one.

Seven gunmen went slowly and carefully backward down the stairs. It is very foolish to try to argue with a hatchetman whose weapon is a Luger up each sleeve. Wide sleeves are very useful.

So seven men entered the chop suey rooms again and drank tea and were silent.

In the Forbidden Room Loo Tun Sin picked up a gleaming knife. The tight mask moved as if he smiled. There were two pictures before him in a frame. Then he gazed down at the two motionless bodies, and—the knife descended.

Below him seven gunmen paid their bills and left the building. They were escorted to the door by a smiling Chinaman who hoped they would come again, and recommended the tea as always hot. But he kept either hand hidden in wide flowing sleeves.

Away from the place, the seven lit cigarettes and the leader spoke, moodily.

"The Shark was there, but the Lord knows what they are doing to him."

"Let's go back and shoot it out with those chinks," suggested and insisted a young and rash member of the gang.

"Don't be a damn fool! Any of those chinks can carve his initials on your face with his bullets."

"He was of the gang!"

"He's in hell now! Peace to his black soul!"

But the hell of the Shark was not yet, and there was to be no peace to his black soul.

In the Forbidden Room Loo Tun Sin gravely surveyed his work on the two motionless figures. One was dead.

"I have clouded the dawn," he said. "Peace to the spirit of the moon!"

LITTLE whispers and wondering glances ran through the underworld when they found the Shark. He was naked, and his body was that of a woman. But the face—there could be no doubt as to the face. It was the face of the Shark.

But—but—! But the body of a woman!

Paddy the Cop saw a Chinaman lying in the gutter.

"Get out o' here!" he ordered. "That will be the gutter yer in, ye yellow scum!"

"Go to Ireland, you damn Mick!" snarled the voice of a white man. But the face was bland and Oriental.

"Now, by Saint Patrick! Here's a Chineemun talks back at an officer! Move on, ye yeller belly!"

"I'm—I—." The eyes hesitated. "I am the Shark!" he said.

"Go on!" jeered Paddy. "They found the Shark—dead. And he turned out to be a woman. Man naked, he were, and no one could mistake. A woman!"

"But—I *am* the Shark!"

"Thin—thin—" a brilliant idea came to Paddy; "thin come to headquarters and we'll look over yer finger-prints!"

It was clever. It would settle Paddy's own doubts on that point, and give him ample opportunity to capture the man if he was a lunatic.

But the man snarled a curse, and held up his hands.

They were bat-shaped pads without fingers!

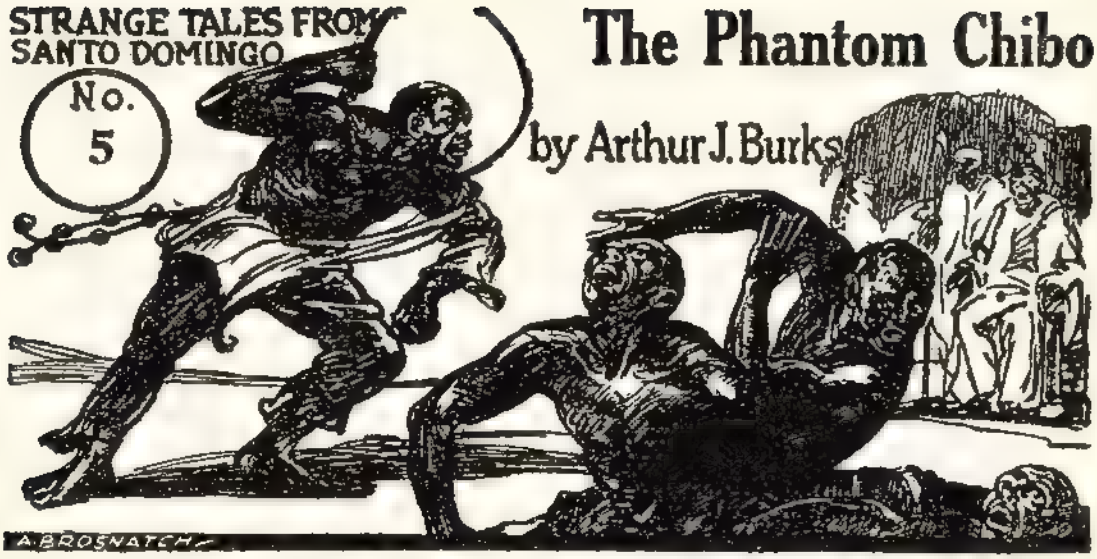
"It's one o' these missionary Chineemun ye are!" decided Paddy. "Get on, or I'll run ye in for impersonating a white man!"

The Chinaman with the white man's voice cursed shockingly, and stumbled away.

LOO TUN SIN sat in the Room of Flowers in the House of Beauty and smiled thoughtfully behind his mask. He gazed on a book in his hands as he murmured aloud, "The theory of the grafting of features is correct. The practise proves it!"

He laid down the book on facial surgery and picked up a rose and inhaled, delicately.

"I have blotted out the features of the dawn," he said. "The dead body of the moon with the face of the dawn! There are many that wonder. It is well."



The Phantom Chibo

by Arthur J. Burks

Author of "Luisma's Return," "Thus Spake the Prophetess," etc.

JOSÉ ESPINOSA, black, wholly a brute, three times a murderer, had escaped from Nigua Prison just a week before the events herein narrated. His sensational break for liberty was the most bewildering in the history of the Dominican Sing Sing. It had taken his jailers three hours to discover how he had won clear of his cell and from the jail. They had opened the cell in the morning, as was customary when there was outside work to be done, and had found their prize bird flown. It developed later that he had escaped through the roof of the cell, after making a four foot leap straight into the air, hanging by one hand while he shifted the iron ventilator to allow for the passage of his body, and then worming his way into an outer corridor through a transom in the office room above—a transom so small that it would hardly have permitted the passage of a half grown boy. Yet Espinosa, weighing almost two hundred pounds, squeezed through it and got out of the prison and out of the stockade—which was twelve feet high and made of viciously barbed wire. He slipped by the sentries, who were posted twelve feet apart around the entire enclosure. He killed the gatekeeper by strangling him with a sleeve of his prison uniform. Then he changed clothes with the gatekeeper, took the key to the gate, slipped through and away into the darkness, carrying the keeper's automatic and ammunition, sixty rounds of the latter, besides two full clips.

Next day *El Siglo* and the *Listin Diario* were full of the new sensation. And the day following there was more sensation, for Espinosa had sent a letter to each of the papers, stating that he would never go back to Nigua alive, and that he would shoot to kill at the first sight of either *Guardia* or *Policia Municipal* on his trail.

It was common knowledge at once that José came nightly into Villa Francesca, a section of the Dominican capital. He had plenty of friends in this very questionable section, all of which friends were only too willing to aid Espinosa in outwitting them.

In this manner began José Espinosa's reign of terror. No *Guardia* or *Policia* would go against him singly, for all knew that José meant what he had written, and thirty dollars a month is small pay for risking one's life. To seek him in a body were useless, for he had friends on

each and every corner, and any body of men was sufficient excuse for that strange warning whistle invented by Espinosa and his friends.

"Quidadito!"

The word in this instance means "take care" and one can render it so closely by whistling that it is understood at once. Try it. José, wherever he might be, would always hear the whistle, for his friends everywhere repeated it, picking it up and passing it on, just as buglers repeat bugle calls. Entering any street in Villa Francesca after dark, if you were a stranger even, you would feel the gooseflesh creep up your spine as you heard the weird sound of warning, and would automatically move out into the center of the street to avoid dark corners. If you knew the story —and you would know it if you had been in Santo Domingo more than twenty-four hours—you would know that José Espinosa, the black brute, was somewhere near and that he was tightening his grip on his automatic, perhaps peering out at you from a crack in the door of a native house. You carried your hand free of your pockets with careful unconcern.

I was a member of our secret service at this time and the doings of José Espinosa did not interest me officially. It was a job of the Dominican authorities. These authorities were very much afraid. When a people fears the darkness of night, a flesh and blood brute of a black man becomes a doubly fearful thing.

Then one of my men made a mistake. A costly mistake for him. Lieutenant Ruiz, of the *Policia*, encountered one of my agents in an alley in Villa Francesca and informed him that he had just seen José Espinosa armed to the teeth, drinking openly with a loose woman in the Café de los Santos. My agent asked Ruiz why he did not make José prisoner. Ruiz's shrug was a masterpiece of eloquence. My agent took it upon himself to offer assistance, which was eagerly accepted by Ruiz.

The agent walked to a street corner with Ruiz, and the latter pointed out to him the Café de los Santos. The agent happened to know Espinosa, having seen him repeatedly at Nigua Prison. He walked boldly toward the café. Before he reached it José came out into the street with swaggering unconcern, and looked casually to right and left. He saw my agent and faced him at once, hands on hips and staring belligerently. The agent stopped about ten paces distant.

"I want you, José," he said quietly.

"So do several other people," replied the black, just as quietly, "but they won't take me, and neither will you!"

It was done so quickly that my agent hadn't a chance. He sank to the ground without a sound, a bullet hole squarely between his eyes. José emptied the remainder of the clip into the agent's body. He slipped home another clip and fired bullets into several doors near by, hints for people to keep their heads inside. Then he walked out to the end of the street into the jungle, which was so cut up with trails that pursuit was useless without Dominican guides—and a Dominican guide wouldn't have followed José Espinosa for half the wealth of Santo Domingo!

Next day there was a new challenge in the papers. José had cast his defiance into the teeth of the Forces of Occupation! He knew that agent and thought that the secret service of the Occupation was on his trail—which it was as soon as knowledge of the killing came to the ears of the governor.

I was given the job of hunting down the killer—and as much assistance as I might require.

This was in the morning after the killing. Late that night while I, in civilian clothes, was riding in a

Dominican car down one of the streets in Villa Francesca, I heard the murderous pow of a service automatic and fancied I could hear the bullet sizzle as it flipped past in front of my face. I jumped out and spent two hours in the search for the would-be assassin—without avail. Next day I received a note from Espinosa, in which he deplored his marksmanship and promised that he would take more care next time!

Then began a game of hide-and-seek that lasted for three weeks, ending at last in the marsh of the phantom *chibo*. "Chibo" is the Dominican word for goat. The marsh is outside the limits of the capital and is formed by the rise and fall of the tide, which sets back into Ozama River. The marsh lies in the southern angle formed by the joining of the two rivers. A dank, evil-smelling place, overgrown with giant tules.

The phantom *chibo* was a contemporary of Espinosa's. Its story began a few days after the escape from prison of the murderer. Rumor had it that every night, just as the bells on Cathedral Colon boomed out the hour of midnight, the piteous bleating of a goat could be heard from the midst of the marsh. This bleating lasted for ten minutes, never longer. It was first noticed by people who were compelled to pass Aguadulcie (the name of the swamp) after nightfall. They were country folk who had been kept after hours in the marts of trade.

The phantom was investigated by Dominican police and no footprints were found, except a few marks of human feet. Goat-owners were ordered to lock up their animals after dark and they obeyed the order. Yet, each night after the order went into effect, that piteous bleating came from the swamp and lasted exactly ten minutes. And every goat in the section was carefully accounted for! So the natives named it a phantom and gave Aguadulcie a wide berth after nightfall.

Two weeks after José's insulting note to me I received another from him, which said that he would be in the marsh of the phantom *chibo* at exactly midnight of the night following, and if I wasn't afraid of ghostly animals to come and get him. He generously allowed me to bring another man along—to carry me home, he said!

Ten minutes before the time for the strange tryst with the black, another agent, than whom there was no nervier in any of Uncle Sam's services, and myself, stood in the opaque shadow of a bayohunda tree at the edge of the swamp, our eyes striving to pierce the gloom of the evil-smelling quagmire. A lane, free of tules, led directly away from us into the heart of the marsh. It was a blacker wedge of gloom in the darkness. The tules waved oddly in the light breeze and some of their dry tops rubbed together with a soft grating sound. I looked at the radium-dial of my wristwatch. Five minutes to 12.

I sat down quietly and removed shoes and stockings. The swamp could be waded easily, if one felt one's way and fought free of sinkholes, but it would be an evil task. I instructed my agent to watch the lane and whatever came out of it.

Then it came. Prepared as I was for its coming, I started back and wiped the cold sweat from my brow. That piteous bleating from the very heart of the swamp! Weird, ghostly, unearthly, strangely challenging.

I fought down my dread and sprang directly into that dark lane through the swamp, sinking almost to my hips at once. I floundered directly toward the weird bleating. I fancied that there was a note of fierce exultation in the sound as the noise of my coming fled before me. I held an automatic in each hand. I fell once

and filled the muzzle of one of them with ooze. I thrust the useless weapon into my waistband with an oath of exasperation. The bleating was much closer each second. Would it last ten minutes this time? I plunged ahead.

Whatever it was that made the noise had begun to move, making a wide circle around me, heading for the shore. I swung toward it and felt myself plunging into a sinkhole. I regained the path, such it was, and moved on in the original direction. Then the bleating ceased, with an odd crescendo of sound, right at the edge of the swamp where I had left the other agent.

"My God! Edwards, come back—"

It was the voice of the agent, broken off short, a gurgling mumble, a strangling cough. I turned to retrace my steps, my mind swamped with horror. A heavy blow landed at the base of my brain. Even as I landed in the soft ooze I could feel strange hands seize me under the armpits. Then I knew no more.

I came to myself with a curse of pain and sat up. I was lying at the river side of the swamp, with the lower part of my body in the water—and crabs were nibbling at my bare feet! I had seen drowned men taken from the river after they had been at the mercy of the crabs and fishes, and I couldn't get away from that place quick enough. I floundered back along that trail to where I had left that other agent.

I found him there, faithful to the last, but with a gash in his throat through which the life blood had long since oozed away. His body was cold, proof that I had been unconscious for a long time. I knew that José Espinosa had done enough for one night and that he was perhaps a long way off now. I knew that I could now use my flashlight with perfect safety. I directed the beam here and there, and found a queer mark in the soft earth. The depressions which I saw seemed to have been made by dragging a heavy body along, with the legs touching the ground. The trail was muddy and easily followed; but I lost it on a piece of high ground above Aguadulcie, where it vanished among the great hummocks of coral rock with which the place is strewn.

Heart-heavy with dread and sorrow, I lifted my faithful agent and carried him back toward the city.

Next day I received another note from José Espinosa. He stated that he had left me alive because I was furnishing him with more amusement and sport than he had ever experienced in his life before. He hinted that he might tire of even this; and when he did—.

I COULDN'T get that bleating sound out of my mind that day—it haunted me even in the glaring sunlight of noon. Imagine my horror and amaze when, walking down Separacion Street for my lunch, I heard that very sound issue from the canopy of the Sacred Arch of the Conde, which is at the western end of the street!

I faced about and hurried back. A crippled Haitian squatted there in the shade and he was making that eery noise for the edification of a mob of schoolchildren, who stood grouped about him. This man, a beggar of some note, was so badly crippled that he was compelled to move along the streets on his hands and knees, his black head, adorned with a spade beard at the chin, wagging from side to side, drooling sounds issuing from his lips. His fame as a mimic was known throughout the capital city. It was his stock in trade.

I spoke to him and he looked up sullenly, refusing to say a word, glaring at me with rheumy eyes that were red-rimmed. I saw that it was useless to question him, so turned to the policeman who is stationed always in the Arch, and asked him about the

black man, whom I took to be a Haitian.

"Oh, that is only Felipe La Chucha, a nineteen-year-old imbecile. He is perfectly harmless. Just as you came up he was mimicking the phantom *chibo* for the kids here!"

I looked at the man's shriveled legs and recalled the strange depressions in the soft earth beside my murdered agent the night before. Then I swore at myself for an imaginative fool. Felipe could never have traveled to Aguadulcie on those deformed limbs of his. I was creating a mare's nest.

Then I received another note from José Espinosa, repeating word for word the very challenge he had sent me before, in accepting which I had lost my bravest and best agent.

He named the next night for the tryst and told me to come alone this time.

I thought it over carefully. I wished to bring in this fellow with my own hands. But what single pair of hands could compass the deed? I decided that it was foolish to take the risk. His life was already forfeit many times over.

But I stood alone the next night on the same spot where I had stood that other night, which had ended so fatally. I am sure, however, that José never suspected that in the woods just back of me were four other men, each lying with his cheek against the stock of a Lewis machine gun, extra belts of ammunition within reach. Not even our breathing could be heard as we waited for midnight and the eery bleating of the phantom *chibo*.

I HEARD first the distant booming of the bells on Cathedral Colon. The sound was drowned out by that weird bleating—as of a frightened goat sinking to his death in the quagmire. I heard one of my men utter a startled oath, quickly muffled. I stood still and waited quietly, for ten minutes.

The bleating ceased, and silence settled over the swamp. I knew that José must be satisfied that I had refused his challenge this time. I gripped my flashlight, finger on the switch, in my left hand, holding my automatic firmly in my right. Five minutes—ten! I heard a gentle swishing, sucking sound from that opaque wedge before me. The sound was approaching slowly. A pause. The sound continued. Always approaching. Another pause and I knew that the time had come.

"Now!" I shouted.

I threw a wedge of light directly into that oozy lane.

I saw a tall, mud-covered figure—with a strange, animal-like creature dangling, face to the front, across the upright figure's shoulder! A black creature, ugly, deformed, a knife held in the teeth above the spade beard! A head that moved slowly from right to left—always wagging. The tall figure sank into the ooze and the whole face of the black creature disappeared with the puttttttttttt! of the four machine guns.

The firing ceased, and silence, deep and significant, fell over Aguadulcie.

WE EXAMINED them by the glow of our flashes. José had paid his score and the phantom *chibo* had been laid. The tule-bordered lane was a shambles.

Later I learned that Felipe La Chucha was José's son, by a woman of long ago—a woman whom a one-time president had sent to Beatta Island to die of her many diseases, and who had left this thing of hers behind to be made a mock of by the Dominican populace in the city streets—and to amuse the younger generation that was rising in the land!

NOTE.—*This series of "Strange Tales From Santa Domingo" began in the February number of* WEIRD TALES. *Back copies will be supplied by the publishers, postpaid, for 25 cents each.*

Two Women, One Living and One Dead, Fought for the Life of John Paul

DEAD HANDS

By WALTER G. DETRICK

Author of "Through the Horn Gate"

JOHN PAUL was mad—mad with a delicious, soul-thrilling madness. The hour was late and his path led over a steep hill, but he heeded these things not at all. Eunice's kisses were still warm upon his neck and lips, and the memory of that last embrace still filled his veins with ecstatic tinglings.

The whole experience was delightfully strange and new, for that sort of madness comes but once; yet about it all there was a strange elusive tinge of familiarity which made it the more entrancing. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the rough path under them; his face was turned upward to the star-lit sky. Adam, the first, may thus have walked after the primal tryst with Eve.

Although he was quite alone, it was not in the nature of things that he could be silent at such a time as this, so he sang. There were many songs that he could sing, albeit somewhat badly; but now, with that haunting sense of joy oft repeated running through his brain, he began to hum an impromptu verse:

> I heard you sing in Paradise,
> A thousand years ago;
> I called you from the happy skies
> Down to this world of wo.

It was a strange song; and strange it was for this precise, well-ordered young man to be singing and cavorting under the stars like a barbarian, but he was a little mad.

Past the whitewashed wall he walked, up the hill and down the other side, through the pine-bordered lane and on to the sturdy old farmhouse where he lived; and all the time his eyes saw not and his ears heard not. In the same exalted mood he sought his bed and lay for an hour or more tossing about in a frenzy of happiness.

Worn out by the violence of his emotions he at length slept; and in dreams he seemed to touch the edge of another world. Strange to relate, it was not a celestial world where starry-eyed maidens sang, but a hobgoblin realm full of terrible things. A quaint little old woman slowly ascended the steep path that led to the farmhouse, assisting her uncertain feet with a long staff. Her shoulders were stooped and bowed by the burden of ninety years. Her steps were slow and faltering, each laboring breath bespoke a run-down machine, but the invincible old eyes shone with purpose and determination.

From afar Paul saw her coming and ran swiftly to meet her. Though great tears were running down his cheeks, he was very glad. When he was but a helpless, puling infant, death at one pounce had robbed him of both father and mother, and these old arms were the ones that had taken him up and cared for him. Paul was a good man, and he had been a fairly dutiful grandson, but of late certain memories had been pricking his heart

like a thorn. How often had some act of his caused those fine old eyes to fill with tears! How often, figuratively speaking, had he set his foot on that stout heart!

Feeling very humble and unworthy, he fell on his knees before her and covered her wrinkled hands with tears and kisses, too powerfully moved to utter a word.

The gray figure did not respond to this unwonted display of affection. Astounded, Paul looked up at her face and saw that instead of the accustomed look of doting affection she was regarding him with an expression which was unmistakably hostile. Puzzled and aghast, he drew back a little, still keeping on his knees. Memories which had been submerged in the first rush of emotion began to rise. He remembered the strange and terrible thing now.

"Why, grandmother," he gasped, "you are dead!"

"Yes, my grandson," she replied, and her tone was full of menace. "Yes, I am dead, and you—". She did not finish the sentence, but faded back into the strange and incorporeal limbo out of which she had for a brief moment emerged; and Paul found himself lying on his bed, weak and trembling, and sweating from every pore.

A YOUNG man of the Twentieth Century who has just been graduated from a very modern college does not believe in dreams. Paul was such a man, but in spite of his sophistication he was profoundly disturbed.

It was just a year since he had watched them heap the earth over this grandmother who was the only kin he had ever known. At the thought of her his heart throbbed with pure affection. What a woman she had been! Could father and mother, even if aided by a score of other kindred, have done more for him?

Life had dealt very graciously with this young man, and he was well aware of the fact. Like a very humble Pharisee he began to give thanks for the ways in which he was not as other men are.

First there was his superb body. He had made the football team at college. He knew how much the old woman's patient care had to do with the development of those strong thews and sinews, and in a great measure they were part of the heritage she had bequeathed him. When his first remembrance began she had passed life's allotted three-score and ten, but even so it had not been hard for him to form a mental picture of the wonderful figure she had been in her youth.

His revery changing, he thought of the three hundred fertile acres which were now his. It was a splendid domain, spendidly equipped. No litter of neglect marred the farmstead. Fences, houses and barns were all as they should be. Here and there over the fields were producing oil wells; the black tunnel of a coal mine pierced a hilly corner. All these things, and more, were now his own; but he did not allow himself to forget that it was the gray woman of his dream who had helped to wrest all this from the wilderness, or that it was she alone who had held the possessions intact until he could care for them.

Intruding on these pleasurable musings came conscience with her thorn. The gray woman had been old before he saw the light of day, and frosty age and fiery youth cannot dwell together without conflict. In spite of her affection for him there were times when she could display Spartan sternness. His rebellions were many, but it was her will that prevailed in the end, down to that last morning when, sitting in her chair, tired and full of years, she had fallen asleep for the last time.

His love affair did not begin until after her passing, and he was glad of this, for she was spared the sight of another usurping the place that she had held for so long.

"Are you sure of that?" queried conscience. He remembered his dream and shivered.

Normal, healthy youth, however, does not long remain cast down. Soon his thoughts turned from the dead to the living, and when at last he fell asleep no gray shadow of the past disturbed his rest.

EXISTENCE is a series of storms separated by intervals of calm. In a few short hours Paul had drunk deep of both the bitter and sweet of life, but for a time thereafter nothing disturbed the even tenor of his way. Days, weeks and months crept by. The grain which had been sprouting when he first trudged along the two-mile path singing to the stars was now yellow and ripened. He had taken the same walk many times afterward, always returning in an exalted mood; and since the first eventful evening not even a disquieting dream had come to mar his happiness.

Now he was taking what he fancied would be the last of these rambles. Tomorrow Eunice would be his wife.

From his home, the two-mile path first ran down a long lane, bordered by great pines; then came the big hill. Climbing up one steep side of this and down the other, it then followed a more gentle rise along the whitewashed stone wall to the house on the hill, where Eunice lived.

It was at the foot of the big hill, near the beginning of the whitewashed wall, that the power line crossed. It looked very harmless. Anchored securely to strong steel towers, the vibrating living wires hung thirty feet above the path.

Perhaps Paul's mood still made blind his eyes, perhaps it was not meant that he should see. At any rate, he did not notice a fine wire hanging from the deadly high-tension line above his head. It did not touch the ground, but dangled at just the right height to brush a tall man's neck. To its nether end was attached a short length of cotton string. It had rained slightly a few minutes before, and the fibers of the wet cord bristled warningly.

How this thing came to thrust itself across Paul's path will never be known. It may have been part of the string of a runaway kite, but if so, the kite was never found.

Unseeing and unknowing, Paul passed it by and continued his walk along the whitewashed wall until he came to the house where Eunice lived.

AS USUAL she was waiting for him on the vine-covered porch. With a subdued whoop he bounded lightly up the five stone steps, but at the top he paused momentarily, for she had not risen to greet him. Although he stood directly in front of her she gave no heed to his presence, but continued to gaze expectantly down the two-mile path.

"Eunice, Eunice, where are your thoughts?" he called gayly, but Eunice did not move. She sat still and continued to watch the path by which he had so lately arrived.

Dumfounded, but thinking himself the victim of a prank, he stretched out his muscular arms, intending to lift her bodily from the chair; and then came the great surprize. His groping hands encountered no resistance, but stumbling oddly, he found himself standing at her back; and still Eunice perceived him not. Now desperate, he shouted her name, stamped upon the floor and at last even struck at her, but without avail.

Paul struggled helplessly in the strange net in which he was enmeshed. This was the first time in his experience that he had encountered a com-

pletely baffling situation, and he was filled with impotent rage. Owing to his strange inability to establish contact with material objects, his efforts were confined to stamping upon the floor and shouting. His most earnest attempts, however, did not suffice to cause Eunice to turn her head, and no other person came running in response to his frantic clamor. He was like a goldfish beating its head against the side of a glass prison, or like a child trying to pluck objects from a mirror.

Patient and composed, as was her wont, Eunice waited until twilight had faded into dusk. Then, tossing a light scarf over her shoulders, she rose and started to walk down the path.

Because he was chagrined and frightened by the strange things that were happening to him, Paul followed a little distance behind her. Near their course a huge tawny dog of a fearless breed dozed contentedly. He greeted his mistress with a drowzy opening of one eye and a wag of his stub of a tail, then adjusted himself for another nap. At Paul's nearer approach, however, he leapt to his feet, with a snarl that was half howl, and flung himself in the path between Paul and Eunice. With bristling ruff and gleaming fangs he stood there, valiant, but plainly frightened.

Though young, Paul would usually have served as a model for those who would acquire the virtues of moderation and self-restraint, but now he was in something like a berserk rage. Here at last was something which knew and recognized him, and he felt that it had no right to be hostile. Straight at the threatening jaws he launched the same kick that had brought him renown in many a hotly contested game, but the results were not what he anticipated. His flying foot encountered nothing but empty air; and thrust forward by the impetus of his kick he found himself on the other side of the brute.

The inexplicable hemmed Paul around like a wall, and he could not escape therefrom, but it was otherwise with the dog. For the first and only time his stanch courage forsook him, and he fled snarling and whining.

Eunice turned to look at the antics of the dog with wonder and amaze, but she saw or heard naught of the man who now stood by her side. Presently she gave a little cry of alarm and started to run swiftly down the path. Paul tried mightily to follow, but he could not. Night was coming —thicker, blacker night than he had ever known—and although his feet were like leaden weights he could not keep them on the ground. He heard Eunice's piercing shriek when she came to the wires at the foot of the big hill; and then the fearsome rushing night engulfed him absolutely.

The dark curtain closed not only over his sight, but over all his other senses as well. Hearing, touch, taste, smell—all were gone; yet as these faded it was as if a light were turned on in his mind, thereby adding many cubits to his mental stature. The mystery which had baffled him was now revealed. He now knew that his body lay stark and still under the deadly wire, and that Eunice was bending over it, screaming frantically for aid. He, himself, was no longer in the world or of it, but on some plane very far removed from earthly things.

His terror and panic were gone, but there were many things which he could not fathom even with his greatly increased thinking power. Myriads before him had passed through this same gate of darkness; every moment thousands more must be taking the same journey, yet he remained a lonely intelligence, lost in the depths of the black infinite. It was all unthinkably horrible. Where, oh, where, were those others?

Mortal limitations prevent the telling of much that he experienced in this strange world. Knowledge did not filter to him through narrow sense-channels. Instead, his soul, freed of fleshy restrictions, now perceived clearly what before had been seen as through a glass darkly.

It was in this way that he eventually became aware of another presence. From out the fog and murk of mystery the gray woman of his dreams was coming to him. He felt, as of old, the dominant force of her. Here she was no longer aged and feeble, but a strong being as was her right. She was neither friendly nor hostile; her attitude was one of triumph.

"I could not go to you, but you have come to me," was the message she sent him.

Whether she had spoken or whether it was a thought passing from mind to mind, he could not tell. Fervently he wished that there had been something of warmth or affection in her greeting; but, nevertheless, her coming had made his situation much more bearable. His eager, searching mind seemed about to solve the great secret of existence when there came another sudden and dramatic change.

In a twinkling the gray woman became inconceivably remote, and he was once more a speck in the black depths of infinity. He felt himself tossed hither and thither—a helpless pawn in the struggle of two great contending forces.

After this came a period of dull blankness, broken at intervals by flashes of real earthly pain. Racked by the most intense bodily pangs, he seemed to have endured an age of torture before he at last opened his eyes on the kindly earth.

He was lying in bed in an unfamiliar room. Dr. Sayres, his old family physician, and a younger medico whom he knew but slightly, were in attendance on him. Eunice and a white-gowned nurse were aiding them.

As Paul struggled for full consciousness he made an effort to speak, but the young medico motioned him to silence. Both doctors listened gravely to his heart beats, then they gave him a few drops of a powerful stimulant.

He lay very still, and moment by moment strength flowed back into his body. Presently nurse and doctors withdrew, leaving him alone with Eunice.

"Paul—Paul!" she sobbed; "by heaven's mercy you have come back to me. I walked down the path a little way to welcome you, and found you lying under the power line. You have been unconscious for hours, and part of the time they said that you were really dead. In spite of their greater knowledge I could not give up hope. I kept the doctors to the task of restoring you, and now you are here—the battle is won."

Paul spoke weakly, but from a full heart: "Oh, Eunice, my dearest, you have won a greater battle than you can imagine. I have a strange story which I will tell you sometime, but not now."

The converse of two people who have just passed such a great crisis needs but few words. Eunice pressed her face to one of Paul's hands and they sat in silent thankfulness.

Unwillingly Paul had glimpsed great mysteries, and he had a fervent desire to forget it all. After a little while he began to pray. None of the formal prayers which he knew seemed meet for the occasion, so he couched his petition in the words of a familiar hymn:

A veil 'twixt me and Thee, dear Lord,
  A veil 'twixt Thee and me;
Lest we should hear too clear, dear Lord,
  And unto madness see.

GEORGE BURROUGHS, MARTYR

No. 4

by Seabury Quinn

Author of "The Phantom Farmhouse," "Out of the Long Ago," etc.

IN ONE of his terror tales, Poe tells how the inmates of a lunatic asylum overcame their keepers, locked them in the cells, and proceeded to administer the affairs of the institution according to the dictates of their own diseased minds. Something like this situation, magnified many times, prevailed in the village of Salem, Massachusetts, in the summer and autumn of 1692.

In the spring, a number of young women and girls, mostly members of respected and influential families, began acting in a way which would have led to an inquiry concerning their sanity half a century later, but which induced the authorities of that day to declare them the victims of witchcraft.

Encouraged by the Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of Salem Village Church, and by the magistrates of the district, these "afflicted children" accused two poor, friendless old women, then a prosperous farmer and his wife, next a universally respected and revered old lady, of the diabolical crime of witchcraft. And in every instance, the accused suffered death.

Absolute power was lodged in the hands of this group of hysterical girls by the credulous public officials. No juvenile despot of antiquity—not even the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland,* with her customary order, "Off with his head!"—ever exercised greater authority over the lives and liberties of a community than this company of young women, the oldest of whom was twenty years of age.

Those first accused were residents of Salem and its environs, people whom the "afflicted" saw daily. In March, 1692, however, came the first "long distance" accusations when the Reverend George Burroughs, residing in Wells, in the Province of Maine, was "cried out upon" by the afflicted children.

MR. BURROUGHS was a man of more than ordinary physique and much more than ordinary character. Short of stature, he was abnormally strong, and combined with great physical strength a nature of unusual sweetness and charity. Prior to the Reverend Samuel Parris' accession to the Salem pastorate, Burroughs occupied the pulpit, but, unlike most

clergymen of his day, he dwelt more upon the love of God than upon His awful wrath, and the iron-souled members of Salem congregation released him in favor of a preacher of sterner doctrine. Incidentally, they allowed him to depart with a considerable portion of his salary unpaid.

Evil fortune seemed to dog Mr. Burroughs' steps. While he was in Salem his wife died; he remarried shortly after taking up his work in another parish, and his second mate also died. Discouraged, all but despairing, he quit the colony of Massachusetts to take up missionary work in Maine. On April 10, 1692, one John Partridge, a marshal of the latter province, arrested him on a warrant charging witchcraft, trafficking with the Evil One, and sundry other diabolical crimes. May 4, he was returned to Salem Village to answer the accusation.

The Reverend Samuel Parris, who acted as clerk of court and assistant prosecutor in this case, as well as others, leaves us this quaint notation of Mr. Burroughs' examination:

At his entry into the courtroom many (if not all of the bewitched) were grievously tortured. Susan Sheldon testified that Burroughs his two wives appeared in their winding sheets and said that man had killed them. He was bid to look upon Susan Sheldon. He looked back and knocked down all (or most) of the afflicted who stood behind him.

Mercy Lewis' deposition going to be read and he looked at her and she fell into a dreadful and tedious fit.

MARY WALCOT ELIZABETH HUBBARD SUSAN SHELDON	Testimony going to be read and they all fell into fits.

The magistrates, as was usual in these cases, attempted to bully the accused into an admission of guilt, asking him again and again if it were not a fact that his house in Maine was haunted by the ghosts of his two murdered wives. The officials appear to have taken it for granted that he had murdered his wives, for had not their shades appeared to the "afflicted" children? And had not these very children sworn away the lives of half a dozen other persons?

Mr. Parris notes that the accused clergyman stoutly denied his house was haunted by ghosts, either of his wives or others, but adds with an air of triumph that he admitted "there were toads in his garden"!

Among other proofs that George Burroughs was a servant of Satan the following facts were testified to: he had been seen to lift a barrel of molasses in his arms and carry it; he had been seen to carry a barrel of cider in his arms; he had been seen to pick up a musket by the muzzle and hold it out at arm's length.

When he explained that God had been pleased to endow him with more than usual strength, the "afflicted children" were one and all "grievously vexed", falling in fits upon the courtroom floor and screaming and crying till the proceedings had to be halted.

No witchcraft trial was complete without testimony from that remarkable twelve-year-old child, Ann Putnam. It was on her testimony that Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn were condemned to death; Giles Corey, of Salem Farms, was arrested on her accusation, so was his wife, Martha Corey. Rebecca Nurse, loved and respected by nearly every dweller in Salem, received sentence of death by hanging largely on Ann's testimony. Whenever other witnesses were wanting to bear conclusive proof against a suspected witch, Ann Putnam could be depended on to furnish the necessary testimony. Consequently, we find this child being duly sworn upon the Holy Scriptures to tell "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" and testifying that Burroughs had appeared to her one night and told her he had three wives and had "butchered the first two to death."

Subsequently, she swore, the shade of Mr. Burroughs suddenly appeared in her bedroom at dead of night, bringing along the ghosts of his two deceased wives as corroborative witnesses. They had turned their faces toward him and "looked very red and angry," telling him he had been a very cruel man to them and that "they should be clothed with white robes in heaven when he should be cast into hell." How typical this statement is of an imaginative child, fed from earliest infancy on ghost tales and the flint-hard doctrine of Knox and Calvin!

EVEN the briefest survey of the Burroughs case discloses the keenest competition among the juvenile witnesses as to who could tell the most outrageously fanciful tale. Take, for example, this statement of Mercy Lewis, as recorded by the Reverend Mr. Parris: "On the night of May 9 Burroughs carried me up to a high mountain and showed me all the kingdoms of the earth and told me he would give them all to me if I would write in his book, and if I would not he would throw me down and break my neck. I told him I would not write in his book if he threw me down on a hundred pitchforks."

Leaving out of consideration the fact that there is no "high mountain" near Salem, the modern reader may be puzzled to know how Mr. Burroughs, who was then lodged under double lock in Salem jail, could get out to convey the girl to the mountain top, how he could manage to disclose "all the kingdoms of the earth" to her from the eminence, and especially how he, a poor, obscure Colonial preacher, with most of his pitifully small salary still owed to him by his former congregation, could deliver her so much wealth. Also, it may be wondered why he did not attempt to make good his threat to break her neck when his munificent offer was refused.

But these questions seem not to have worried the court, for the child's preposterous story was received with all due gravity and made a part of the judicial record.

The book referred to by the Lewis girl was, of course, the devil's black book. In it were inscribed the names of all those who acknowledged themselves Satan's servants. By this acknowledgment they agreed to give the fiend their souls after death, and in return were granted certain supernatural powers which usually manifested themselves as ability to make neighbors' stock sicken and die, cream refuse to churn into butter and hens fail to lay their customary number of eggs. A moment's reflection, it would seem, should have warned the person intending to sign away his soul that the devil was getting decidedly the best of the bargain.

One other statement which sheds an interesting light on the public mind in 1692 appears in the records of this case. It is that of Abigail Williams, niece of the Reverend Samuel Parris and member of his household. It was not made in court, nor was it sworn to, yet it was duly received and preserved as a part of the court's record.

Some time before Mr. Burroughs was brought back to Salem to stand trial, while he was still a hundred miles or so away in Maine, Abigail met Benjamin Hutchinson in the street and suddenly declared she saw Burroughs.

"Where?" demanded Hutchinson, for, naturally, he saw no one.

"There," replied the child, pointing excitedly to a rut in the road.

Hutchinson was carrying a pitchfork over his shoulder, and, to pacify her, he flung the implement at the spot where she declared the clergyman stood. Thereupon (as was characteristic of the "afflicted children")

Abigail Williams fell to the earth in a fit.

After lying rigid in the roadway a few minutes, she rose with a shudder, exclaiming, "You have torn his coat, I heard it rip!"

"Whereabouts?" Hutchinson asked.

"On the side," she replied. "Do not you see the great rent in his garment?"

Naturally, Hutchinson saw no such thing, and said so.

A little later the same day Hutchinson met the child in the house of Lieutenant Ingersol, and she at once manifested every symptom of ungovernable terror, crying, "There he stands! Do not you see him there in the corner?"

The man, now thoroughly convinced the girl really saw some supernatural visitant, advanced upon the shadowy corner of the room, drawing his sword as he walked; but before he had gone four paces, Abigail shrieked, "He is gone; but there stands a gray cat in his place!"

At that Hutchinson struck his rapier through the empty air where the phantom cat was supposed to be crouching, and, in the words of the record, "thereupon she fell into a fit, and when it was over, she said, 'You killed her'."

Now mark how ingeniously this shameless little impostor played upon the superstitious credulity of the man. Half unwilling to be beguiled by her words, yet half fearful she really had seen some evidence of witchcraft, Hutchinson protested he saw no cat's carcass on the floor, but the little maid replied, "Oh, the shade of Sarah Good came and carried her away."

Sarah Good was one of the poor old women who waited execution by hanging in Ipswich jail at the time, and her conviction had been procured largely on the testimony of Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam. Though she had probably never heard the word, Abigail Williams was a shrewd practical psychologist. Having prepared Hutchinson's superstitious mind by her imposing cries and fainting fits, she chose this moment to strengthen the already impregnable case which popular ignorance and credulity had made against poor, friendless old Sarah Good.

The jury impaneled to try George Burroughs gave little time to considering their verdict. He was found guilty as charged, and sentenced to be hanged on Gallows Hill August 19, 1692.

One of the current superstitions was that persons who had really sold their souls to Satan could not repeat the Lord's prayer correctly; but at the gibbet's foot George Burroughs recited the beautiful petition from beginning to end with great fervor and beauty, and quoted from the *Book of Job:*

"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

The "afflicted children", who had gathered on Gallows Hill to see their victim die, attempted to drown out the sound of his words by shrieking that a great, black man stood at his shoulder, dictating the prayer and Scriptural passages to him.

Townsmen of Salem, assembled to see Satan's servant pay the price of his wickedness, were thunderstruck when they heard the holy words fall from the convicted wizard's lips.

"This man is no witch," a murmur ran through the crowd. "Save him; stop the execution; we commit murder!" The people pressed forward to take the condemned preacher from the hangman.

But the Reverend Dr. Cotton Mather, who was also present to witness the execution, spurred his horse between the victim and his would-be rescuers. He preached a fiery sermon from the saddle, reminding the people that the devil could quote Scripture for his purposes, and declaring this was but a cunning artifice of the Evil One to save his servant.

Meanwhile the hangman had adjusted the noose about the prisoner's throat, the platform was snatched away, and George Burroughs' stainless soul ascended to its endless home as his martyred body swung between earth and sky.

A CONTEMPORARY resident of Salem Village, writing of the execution to a friend in Boston, described the last chapter of the Reverend George Burroughs' tragedy in these words: "When he had been cut down, he was dragged by the halter to a hole or grave, between the rocks, about two feet deep, his shirt and breeches being pulled off and an old pair of trousers of one previously executed put on his lower parts. He was so put in that one of his hands and his chin was left uncovered."

So Christians did unto Christians in the name of their common religion in the year of grace 1692.

In WEIRD TALES next month Seabury Quinn tells of the end of the New England witchcraft horror, and narrates how, when more than two hundred witches were lying in the jails of Salem and Ipswich awaiting death at the hands of the common hangman, Governor Phips of Massachusetts suddenly ended the persecution and emptied the jails. The Puritan series will be followed by a thrilling true tale of witchcraft from medieval Germany, told in Mr. Quinn's most fascinating style

A Yellow Newspaper—and an Execution

The Hanging of Aspara

By LEAVENWORTH MACNAB

ASPARA was to die.* The jury took fifty minutes to decide his fate. Next day, lurid scare-headed stories told the populace that the man who had murdered Scaffia, the photographer, believed to be a ringleader in Black Hand affairs, would be hanged in the Parish prison yard in a few weeks. And the populace was thrilled, for nothing awakened greater interest than a prospective hanging, especially when the hangee had got rid of his victim with disgusting bloodiness and brutality.

To keep the thrill to its highest pitch the newspapers got on the job early. Day after day stories to quicken the pulse and feed morbid desire were printed. Reporters worked their imaginations over-time to make their sheet the favorite reading with the hanging devotees.

Sensation after sensation was sprung. The greedy readers were told that an attempt would be made to save the Aspara family from the ignominy of a hanged member by having a sharpshooter pick the murderer off as he made his way to the gallows. Then efforts to send poison and other means of personally wooing death were shriekingly told. The thrill grew.

The *News* was as sensational as its limited means and the law allowed. It catered openly to the lovers of sensation at its reddest, and it refused at all times to permit truth to interfere with its plans.

In former hangings the *News* had had matters pretty much its own way. Its "hanging edition" was always on the street before the cause of it had passed into the unknown. Thousands of copies were sold and their contents devoured before the less sensational papers gave forth their versions. And with papers selling at five cents a copy —well, the *News* needed all the money it could get, for reporters insisted upon eating.

But the Aspara hanging had kindled the entire press. Even the sleepiest of the papers was sitting up, and the *Index*, the one approach to the *News* in sensationalism, was preparing to get out an Aspara hanging edition that would leave nothing unsaid in the way of sensational detail. The *News* must look to its laurels. It did.

PETE KEENE, owner and editor of the *News*, came into the local room one afternoon and summoned MacTavish to his sanctum. "Mac" had blown into the *News* office a few months earlier and landed a job. His unleashed imagination and utter disregard for facts endeared him to Keene. He found thrills on whatever run was assigned to him. He put real estate in the first column of the first page time after time, and found scandal upon scandal when the waterfront was his

**Although fictitious names are used throughout this story, nevertheless the sensational newspaper hoaxes described herein actually occurred just as told. Those residents of New Orleans who remember the Aspara hanging may wonder what newspaper it was that is here given the fictitious name of the* News; *but since that newspaper is no longer published, and Aspara himself long ago passed from this life at the end of a hempen rope, it suffices to print the facts (here revealed for the first time) and let the* News *and its enterprizing police reporter retain their anonymity. —Editor.*

assignment. So Keene readily saw that the police run was where he properly belonged.

Scoop after scoop resulted from the transfer. The sedate morning papers contented themselves by ignoring these as "fakes," but nevertheless the subscription list of the *News* grew rapidly and the street sales brought constant smiles in the business office.

But the efforts of the *Index* in the interest of the Aspara passing were bearing undeniable fruits. The paper was finding readers that heretofore had been absolutely faithful to the *News*, and a canvass of the *News'* circulation showed a falling off for several days. Drastic steps must be taken.

"Mac," said Keene, when the two were seated in his office, "we've got to do something. We're slipping. I want our hanging edition to break all known records, and I want our subscription list built up meanwhile."

"I've written everything that had a semblance of fact in it," said Mac, "and a whole lot more that had not even that. Truth is, this Aspara is dead from the collar up. If he led the Mafia, then it is a harmless thing. He spends his time with the priests and refuses to use even the little English he knows when we try to interview him. There's only one thing to be done."

"And that is—"

"Fake it and fake it strong."

"What have you in mind?"

"A series of sensations inspired by ourselves. Let us put over some fakes so big and so truthful-seeming that even the old morning cronies will have to take notice. I'll never be content until I make them print as follow-ups our worst fakes. They brand us as liars and by that means nullify our scoops when they are genuine scoops."

"Go as far as you like, Mac. But what stories are there?"

"There are always stories; the air is full of them. Give me until tomorrow morning and I will submit a plan."

Two days later a "box-car head" in the *News* told the city that a bold attempt to cheat the gallows of Aspara had been made. A cake had been mailed to him from a point in Mississippi. It was a harmless-looking confection of the sponge variety, but cleverly buried in it were two sharp saws.

The cake was delivered at the prison about half an hour before the home edition's deadline. It came in a special delivery package. Scarcely had it been received when Mac approached the sheriff.

"Sheriff Short," he said excitedly, "is it true that weapons have been sent to Aspara concealed in a pie or cake?"

The sheriff was acutely surprized.

"Who in H— told you that?" he shouted. "There's a leak somewhere in this office! Why, the cake has scarcely been cut! I demand that you tell me who informed you."

Mac looked innocent and rather hurt.

"Why, Sheriff, our office just called me to say that such a rumor reached them. Is it true?"

"Well, since you know, it is true. Here's the cake. It's a clever piece of work, too. See how the saws have been baked right in it. See how the heat has tarnished them."

Mac looked and concealed a smile.

"That's what comes from long experience in detecting crime, Sheriff," he said. "None but an expert would notice a thing like that."

Then he hurried to a telephone.

"Let her go, John," he said to the city editor. "The cake came and Sheriff Short is trying to find the leak in his office—the leak that gave

us the tip. It's a good thing we thought of mucilaging the edges of the cake where we inserted the saws. Quote the sheriff as saying the saws were baked in the cake."

The press room at the Criminal Court was in a furor when the *News* scoop became known. Hurried trips to the sheriff's quarters confirmed the story. There were the cake and the saws, and the sheriff telling how cleverly the work had been done. The *Democrat* and all the others had to run the story. The cake was mailed from Pass Christian, and correspondents there told of the tall, dark, foreign-looking man who had been seen skulking about the town, carrying a suspicious-looking parcel. None of these was acquainted with the business manager of the *News*.

SCARCELY had the cake grown stale when another thriller quickened the heart-beats of the populace. This time holy-picture cards were the novel means of getting Aspara on the front pages. Innocent-looking post cards were mailed to the condemned man. But Sleuth Short was not taking any chances. The cards felt bulky. He opened one of them with his jack-knife. A white powder spilled upon his desk. Aha! Someone trying to smuggle poison! Isn't it damnable?

And just then Mac appeared.

"Is it true that poison has been sent to Aspara?" he asked.

The sheriff bellowed his anger. He cursed his underlings, but finally admitted the truth of the story.

"I know a great deal about poisons," he said, "but this baffles me. I will send it to the city apothecary for analysis. That's all that can be done now. But who the H—— told *you* about it?"

At ten minutes to deadline Mac called the city editor.

"Went through swimmingly, John," he said. "The quinine is to be sent to the city apothecary for analysis and that, you know, will mean a couple of months. Short says he knows a lot about ordinary poisons but this baffles him. Probably some deadly importation. Play that up. I forgot it when I wrote the story last night."

The two big beats brought the *News* into its own again. Its public was back eating out of its hand, and the hanging was only a day off.

"We just want one more sensation," Keene said to Mac, "and the thing is done."

Mac was writing a sob story, to appear after the hanging, about the lone bouquet of faded flowers laid on the bier of the murderer by the frayed little woman that called him husband, when Keene made the suggestion. Mac thought a minute.

"I have it!" he said. "Spring a story today that a reprieve may be granted Aspara. That will disappoint the people tremendously and make them watch and hope that it fails."

"Great!" shouted Keene. "John, call the governor on long-distance while Mac writes the story."

The governor was asked whether he would grant a reprieve if Aspara made a confession implicating the Black Hand. Of course, he said he would. Then Mac hurried to the condemned cell and spoke to Aspara.

"I come with a message from the governor," he said melodramatically as he approached the bars. "If you will confess what you know about the Mafia, the governor will grant you freedom."

Aspara shot a look of hate at the intruder.

"Me no confessa," he snarled. "Me confessa to priest only."

But that was enough.

"Aspara will carry his knowledge of the Mafia to his grave," began the follow-up story. "He stolidly maintains his silence and even the offer of

freedom made by the governor fails to move him. When the reporter of the *News*, sent by the governor to Aspara, gave him the message which pointed the way to possible freedom, the condemned man spurned the chance to save his life. Even the pleadings of his wife, a fragile, pitiable creature, failed to move him. He flung her angrily from him and snarled: 'Me confessa to priest only.' "

And the world read and chuckled. The suspense was lifted. Aspara was to die—the story of the death agony was to be told in all its gruesome details.

MAC wrote the story of the hanging the night before it happened. It was an easy task, for people go to the scaffold in much the same way. There are certain things that one can be practically certain about. The shudder and the drooping forward of the body at the first sight of the gallows is always perfectly safe. The Criminal Court building, too, is a splendid setting for a tragedy of this kind. The condemned cell is on the top floor and the procession reaches the yard of the Parish prison by a winding stairway. Then the tread of the feet on the paved flooring, then the glimpse of the gallows, and the shudder, and then—that was as far as Mac ever got. The rest of the journey could be taken as certain to go off without a mishap.

As the Aspara procession turned the corner, Mac jumped to the 'phone which he had preëmpted in Judge Skinner's office.

"Let her go, John!" he shouted.

Then, while he rushed down the stairs and into the prison yard to see the victim cut down, and get the intimate details for the home edition, a thousand sturdy voices began to yell through the streets of the city:

"All about the hangin' of Aspara."

It was half an hour later before the *Index* got on the street.

TWO months after Aspara's death Keene and Mac and the city editor had the heartiest sort of a laugh. The city apothecary had just handed down his finding in the case of the holy-picture cards and the white powder they contained. It stated that he had tried the substance on rats and found that it was a slow poison of the deadliest sort.

"It's a pity we can't tell the truth for once and get the laugh on them all," said Mac as he picked up the half-emptied package of quinine from Keene's desk.

"It would be the best sort of a joke," said the city editor.

"Yes," opined Keene, "but remember there will be other hangings—at least I hope so. The last edition certainly broke all records for sales, and our circulation has grown steadily ever since. People are coming to know who feeds them the right sort of stuff, and we must not spoil it."

"Well, anyway," commented Mac, "we made the old fogies follow us a half dozen times. I'm satisfied. But just let the city apothecary get gay with me!"

FROM time to time WEIRD TALES is asked to reprint the great weird stories of the past. Hardly a week passes without the receipt of several letters calling attention to some old masterpiece. Within the past month it has been suggested that we reprint the weird tales of Hoffmann; *Wandering Willie's Tale,* by Sir Walter Scott; *The Dead Leman,* by Gautier; *The Monkey's Paw,* by W. W. Jacobs, and *A Terribly Strange Bed,* by Wilkie Collins. We have repeatedly been asked to run Bram Stoker's vampire-novel, *Dracula,* in serial form; but this we shall not do because it would take too much space away from new stories (*Dracula* comprizes 378 pages in book form).

But (as we have repeatedly stated in The Eyrie) WEIRD TALES belongs to you, the readers; and we are going to try out your suggestion that we reprint one of the shorter masterpieces of weird fiction in each issue. Edgar Allan Poe is barred, because every lover of weird fiction is already acquainted with his works, and reprinting his tales would give nothing to our readers that they do not already possess. What we want is the lesser-known masterpieces of short weird fiction. We should not care, for instance, to reprint Fitz-James O'Brien's *What Was It?* or *The Diamond Lens,* because most of you are already familiar with these two stories; but there are less known stories by this author, which may be welcomed by you, the readers. Every lover of weird fiction is already acquainted with Ambrose Bierce's *The Damned Thing, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,* and *The Man and the Snake,* so we shall not reprint these; but fewer are acquainted with *An Inhabitant of Carcosa,* or *The Middle Toe of the Right Foot.*

It will not be practicable in all cases to reprint the stories you select, but every effort will be made to conform to your wishes. The stories must be weird, they must possess unusual merit, and they must be short.

If you recall any wonderful weird tale that you think the readers of this magazine would like to read, let us know about it. We have selected, so far, only the first of the "Weird Story Reprints." This is *The Three Low Masses,* a ghost-tale of old Provence, by Alphonse Daudet. Other short masterpieces of weird fiction will follow in succeeding issues. The selection of stories will be left to you, the readers, as far as possible. Daudet's delicious ghost-tale will appear next month.

R. G. Macready, of Durant, Oklahoma, writes to the editor: "You are to be commended on the determined stand you, as well as the great majority of WEIRD TALES readers, have taken against those who protest at the weird quality of the stories printed in your periodical. Why do not these people, who are trying to wipe out of existence the only magazine of its kind, turn

their artillery upon the sex-exploiting magazines that are crowding the best magazines out of place on our news stands? Anyway, a mind that can go undiseased through that so-called literature should be able to survive the pleasantly exhilarating 'kick' of a good horror tale. There can be no question as to the literary status of WEIRD TALES. In it have appeared stories worthy of Kipling himself, to say nothing of Poe."

"I believed WEIRD TALES is the best magazine published," writes Paul J. Schwartz, of Ambridge, Pennsylvania, in a letter to The Eyrie, "and any change in it would tend to spoil everything."

Writes Robert Leeds, of Clifton, New Jersey: "I think that WEIRD TALES is very interesting and thrilling. With me its action is like that of the pudding of which the boy said, 'It tastes like more.' Often I find myself wishing that the magazine was published daily, or at least weekly."

The Reverend L. A. Crittenton, of Cairo, Illinois, suggests: "Why not have a vote on the best story that has appeared in WEIRD TALES since its first appearance? I personally have enjoyed all, but remember, as outstanding. *The Abysmal Horror* and *Invaders From Outside*. I most certainly cast my vote that the magazine maintain its present character and that the tales be not modified to suit more timid dispositions."

Mrs. F. C. Harris, of Fairfield, Iowa, writes to The Eyrie: "I have always been an interested reader of WEIRD TALES. I like the type of stories which you print. In my opinion they are very much more wholesome than the sex stories of today, which are prevalent in nearly every other magazine. I am very partial to the astronomical and pseudo-scientific tales, though I enjoy most of the horror tales, too."

Willis A. Milspaw, of Philadelphia, writes: "Last Wednesday at 5 P. M., on my way home, hungry, I bought WEIRD TALES at the subway station, and began the first story: *When the Green Star Waned*. Changed cars. Presently everyone began to leave the car. I looked out and found we were at the end of the line, several squares beyond my stop. When a story is good enough to take me past dinner, it *is* good."

"I am thankful to see a magazine that is not about love and such stuff, for a change," writes Mrs. M. Gregory, of Chicago. "There is nothing whatever disgusting or 'nauseating' about WEIRD TALES. It is all right as it is."

Writes Ed. Schultz, of Buffalo, New York: "The April WEIRD TALES is better than ever. Keep up the real horror stuff. Cut out serials if you can. Let's have more planetary stories. The best in the April issue were: *When the Green Star Waned* and *The Wind That Tramps the World*."

And here is a knock, adroitly combined with a boost, from Mrs. Lilla May Savino, of Portsmouth, Virginia: "I want to state that you have *got* a serial now in the fascinating story, *Invaders From the Dark*. We are all worked up over it. I have a rose for *The Wind That Tramps the World* and *Back From Dust*. But I want to beg of you, dear editor, please, please, never give us any more such vulgar, unsavory stories as *The Haunting Eyes*. Give us weird tales a-plenty—transmigrations of souls, ghost, fish and snake stories, but in the name of all that is decent give us *clean* stories. Thus far our magazine has been a clean publication."

Miss Rae Mendell, of Philadelphia, writes: "Although I am not a subscriber to WEIRD TALES, yet I never miss a single copy, and can hardly wait for each new issue."

Writes James N. Graham, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania: "I would enjoy very much another story on the fourth dimension—a very interesting topic. Scientific stories are always more than welcome; also horror and vampire

tales. My delight is in the kind that raises your hair, chills your spine and makes your knees knock all at the same time. Would suggest you procure nurses for those wretched people who want you to drop WEIRD TALES from the standard that makes it the outstanding magazine that it is. Would like to shake hands with M. H. Wender of Oak Hill, West Virginia. He is a man after my own heart, one who speaks straight from the shoulder."

"I surely hope you don't discontinue printing weird stories in the magazine," writes Carl Ballard, of Danville, Virginia. "This is the only magazine that prints the kind of stories I like."

And Douglas Tunsberg, of Chicago, writes: "Hurrah for weird tales that are *weird!* If some people want them different, let them read some of Burgess' *Bedtime Stories. When the Green Star Waned* is the best story in your April issue."

Writes Elsie Ellis, of New York: "May I mention my delight in the continued quality of WEIRD TALES and indicate my appreciation of their consistency? And yet the story of the last three months which sticks in my mind most noticeably is Henry Whitehead's *The Thin Match,* which wasn't weird at all. That shows someone's on the job."

Lieutenant W. J. Stamper, of the Marine Corps, writes from San Diego, California: "I have just finished reading the April issue of WEIRD TALES and must cast my vote for *The Lure of Atlantis.* I can truthfully say that I enjoyed this story more than any you have yet published. If I had a second choice it would most certainly be *When the Green Star Waned.* For singularity of conception it simply takes the candy."

Writes L. A. Jacq Pomprein, of Detroit: "I have read your stories until I almost believe them. They are without doubt the most unusual since the imperial Poe enlightened the dull world with his horrifying tales. *The Lure of Atlantis, The Soul-Catching Cord* and *Invaders From the Dark* are the headliners of the latest issue. Give us more poems from Francis Hard."

Clifford Andresen, of Anamosa, Iowa, writes: "I have been buying WEIRD TALES for at least six months, and I think it is the best magazine of that kind of stories out. I shall keep on taking it as long as it appears on the news stands."

Avonne Taylor and Theresa Johnson write from Richmond, Indiana, as follows: "In reading WEIRD TALES, we have come to the conclusion that it is one of the best and most unusual magazines ever published. As to changing the stories, we say absolutely *do not,* because the more weird the better. And let's have some more stories like *The Composite Brain.*"

Since the readers of WEIRD TALES liked *The Lure of Atlantis* so well, we are going to print a two-part serial by the same author, Joel Martin Nichols, Jr.—a story called *The Devil-Ray,* that is fully guaranteed to send the chills chasing each other up and down your back. This story will appear very soon.

The readers' favorite story in the April issue, as expressed in letters to The Eyrie, is *When the Green Star Waned,* by Nictzin Dyalhis. Other stories ran high in the poll, but at the time of going to press Mr. Dyalhis' story has twice as many votes as its nearest competitor, which is *The Lure of Atlantis,* by Joel Martin Nichols, Jr.

We have but one way of knowing what stories you like, so that we can give you more of the same type, and that is by the letters we receive from you, the readers. What is your favorite story in the present issue? Address your letter to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 317 Baldwin Building, Indianapolis, Indiana, and let us know which stories you like best.

The Third Thumb-Print

(Continued from page 374)

and announced: "No. 5 is a thief—cunning, deliberate, daring. No. 6 is a half-witted murderer—kills for no reason at all."

"Thanks ever so much," said Steel, as he put his notebook and pencil away.

"You published the names under the prints?"

"Yes; the names were published last evening. There's something to your system, for the last two men have just been convicted of the crimes you charge them with, and the first two are prominent business men. I'll fake a reading for you, Professor, unless you give me a more truthful one."

Instantly the old man arose, his voice and temper raised to the highest pitch.

"Fake a reading!" he exclaimed. "You publish the results as I gave them to you."

"I couldn't do that. It would make you out either a murderer or a faker."

"You've told the public I'd report on five thumb-prints. Young man, it is your plain duty to give the public my reports as I gave them to you."

"But don't you see what that would mean to you?"

"I understand; but personalities cannot stand in the way of duties. Now, Mr. Steel, farewell. I must think."

GUY STEEL slowly went out of the room, out into the open. No click of the lock followed his departure.

Professor Sanders sat at his desk and thought. He ate no breakfast, no lunch; indeed, he was unconscious of the coming and passing of the midday hours. He thought of the nineteen years of constant labor on a single idea, of the endless days and nights spent in collecting, classifying, and analyzing material for his one great work. He had gained little of that seductive publicity that the world confuses with success, but he cared not for the fame of life: he wanted the fame that lasts through all eternity. He sought for the imperishable glory that belongs to him who adds to the store of human knowledge.

Nineteen years—and then, success! He had nursed a chance idea into a marvelous science. He had reduced the investigations of nearly two decades into the bounds of a single volume. Although the book had not been sent to the publishers (it would be sent in a few days), the scientific men all over the world were attacking it, defending it, discussing it. Scholar and layman alike awaited the appearance of the book—the general expectation was the immediate result of a simple announcement Sanders had made to one of his fellow teachers. The newspapers had somehow learned of the startling discoveries, had informed the public, and then sought to satisfy with imaginative interviews the curiosity they had aroused. Fame had burst upon Professor Sanders. Already life promised to be easier for him. The college had raised his salary; the royalties from his book would doubtless be of dignified dimensions; magazines would offer astonishing sums for authentic articles on the new science. In some slight measure, he would be recompensed for the meager years just ended. Instead of being the withered hermit, he would be the fêted scholar. Fame, pleasant and satisfying, would be his while yet alive; and unending fame would be his after death.

His mind wandered back to the incident of the morning. He, Professor Sanders, the originator of the system

of determining criminality from thumb-prints, was a murderer. . . . That might be; after all, an individual is not master of his fate. If the world would consider him a murderer, Sanders would be satisfied; but the world would not consider him a criminal; it would say, with sneers and laughter, "Ah, a wonderful system! The only trouble is that it fails when applied to its originator." This would bring the entire system into disrepute, would cause hilarity at the expense of the pedagogue who had foolishly wasted his life erecting the framework of a science that tumbled down when subjected to a final test. The scientific world would smile a knowing smile and then pass its learned attention to other matters. Professor Sanders would be forgotten by everyone except the humorists. He winced at the thought; it was more than he could bear. He had wanted eternal fame and had been only too glad to sacrifice all in life to gain it. And now—well, now that he seemed on the point of success, when all his fondest hopes and dreams were almost realized, utter failure blackened all the future.

"How are you this afternoon, Professor?"

The words startled: they shattered a train of thoughts like a stroke of lightning.

"I thought you had gone home, Guy."

"I just came back. You didn't answer the door, so I walked right in. I came back to apologize for the dirty trick I played on you."

"Never mind. As long as I did not know you were a reporter, I did not mind talking to you."

"But I mean for taking your glasses."

"You found my glasses; you did not take them."

"I'm ashamed, but I took them. It occurred to me in an unfortunate moment that it would be a good joke to try your system on yourself. You were playing with your glasses, and I just took a long chance that your thumb-mark would be on them. I managed to pick them up from your desk and get away with them. The lines of your thumb were there all right, and I had them copied; and this morning I made believe that I found your glasses on the floor."

He looked downward, repentant, thoroughly sorry for his misdeed.

"I know you won't forgive me, but—"

Professor Sanders did not answer at once. He looked at the young man before him—the youth he had taken a liking to as an undergraduate, the man whose visit he had enjoyed the day before. A smile—the vaguest trace of a smile—lit up his face, as he languidly spoke:

"When you took my spectacles yesterday, you cast me among the dead for many hours during the brief period of fame. My partial death served your purpose; your complete death will serve mine."

He took a revolver from a lower drawer, an old-fashioned weapon that belonged to past generations, and pointed it at Steel. Guy stood speechless, strengthless, thoughtless.

"The system demands as a final proof that I be a murderer. Forces beyond my control require that I kill someone. You, my lad, have caused me more misery than anyone else. It is only logical, therefore, that I should kill you."

"God!" screamed Guy Steel, finally regaining the use of his voice; but he said nothing more.

The bullet hit him in the heart, and he fell over without even a moan. Professor Sanders took one look at the dead man, walked to the front door, opened it, and shouted to all the world:

"Murder!"

Monsters of the Pit

(Continued from page 348)

three feet away. I had been too late, and the spider had accomplished his deadly work. The scientist had been killed by the product of his own insane cunning.

We made good our escape, and it was well, for if another spider—well, I had reached the limit of my sanity.

In the passageway, Irene caught a glimpse of my hand for the first time.

"Scott!" she screamed. "Look!"

My hand was enormously swollen, and even as I watched I could see a blue discoloration working its way toward my elbow. In the excitement I had forgotten the slash from the keen fangs of the spider. I was as good as doomed.

Irene still held the ax, and as I stood there, shaking like a leaf, she raised her eyes in a prayer for courage. I read the answer in her face, and without being told I laid down my swollen arm.

WELL, gentlemen, it took her three hacks to get it off. How the blood was stanched I don't know, for the next thing I remember was being jolted along in an ox-cart, bound for the nearest surgeon. A nigger was driving, and I was feeling fine. My head was pillowed in Irene's lap. I looked back, then, and saw a red glow against the evening sky. The slaves had fired the place, and fled. From what I have been able to learn, the spiders died in the ruins, for I've never seen a spider any bigger than my hand since that day. To tell the truth, I don't want to.

Irene married me at Cairo, and as soon as I was able, we left for England.

Now there's the story, gentlemen; you may believe it or not. . . Waiter, will you kindly bring another bottle of vermouth?

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for April 1, 1925.

State of Indiana }
County of Marion } ss.

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 317 Baldwin Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 317 Baldwin Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 317 Baldwin Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

2. That the owner is: (If the publication is owned by an individual his name and address, or if owned by more than one individual the name and address of each, should be given below; if the publication is owned by a corporation the name of the corporation and the names and addresses of the stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of the total amount of stock should be given).

Wm. R. Sprenger, 317 Baldwin Bld., Indianapolis, Indiana.

Farnsworth Wright, 317 Baldwin Bldg., Indianapolis, Indiana.

George M. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

George H. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

P. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is_____. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26th day of March, 1925.

ANNA M. MORGAN,
[SEAL] Notary Public.
My commission expires January 26, 1929.

The Devil-God

(Continued from page 356)

yards of Mpatanasi, and its dragging talons stiffened and shot upward and seized Mpatanasi about the arm.

The flames expired. Mpatanasi's arm was twisted violently, and then literally torn off. A stream of blood gushed from a cavern of ragged encrimsoned walls, a cavern of mutilated tissue that flared horribly where Mpatanasi's elbow should have been, and spattered Mpatanasi's wet torso and perspiring thighs. Mpatanasi felt himself falling—falling through space. He closed his eyes, and endeavored to quell the unnatural fear in his poor, tired brain.

3

MU-SENYUI waited under the aloe palms. He squatted on his knees, and fumbled nervously with a covered object, which lay beside him on the ground. The object was the size of a large melon and it was concealed beneath several layers of yellow leaves. Mu-senyui seemed eminently proud to possess the object, and yet he displayed an admirable reticence and tact in his handling of it. Mu-senyui waited under the aloe palms for Mpatanasi's daughter.

She came to him over the cool, wet sward with gilded eyebrows and painted lips and ivory plugs in her nose and ears. She came singing, and she smiled gloriously when she beheld patient, tolerant Mu-senyui with the covered object beside him on the ground. She came up to him, and kissed him on the lips and ran her nimble fingers through his curly hair.

"Dear, dear Mu-senyui," she said.

Mu-senyui regarded her cynically. "It is very unfortunate," he observed. "Your father might have arranged a more convenient and less sensational demise. Why did he not stay and have it out with the forest-devil?"

The daughter of Mpatanasi knelt and took the covered object into her hands. Slowly she unwound the yellow leaves. She was exceedingly happy, and she beamed upon kind, tired Mu-senyui. The last wrapping fell away, and the face of Mpatanasi her father stared mildly up at her. His lips were parted, and the kindness and nobility of his spirit glittered in his eyes. His face was chastened, ascetic, at peace with man. He bestowed a generous benediction upon Mu-senyui and his painted daughter.

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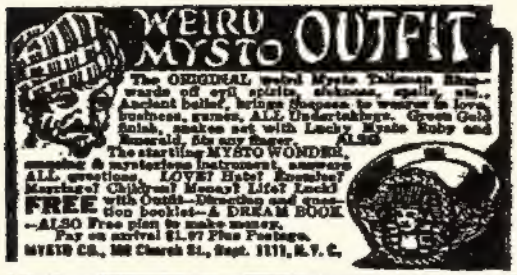

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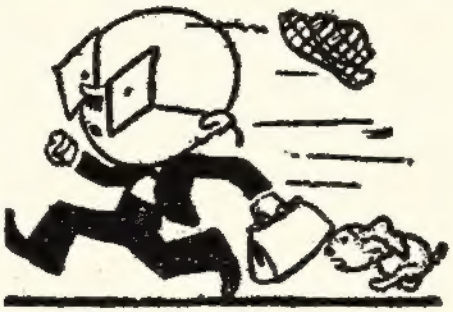

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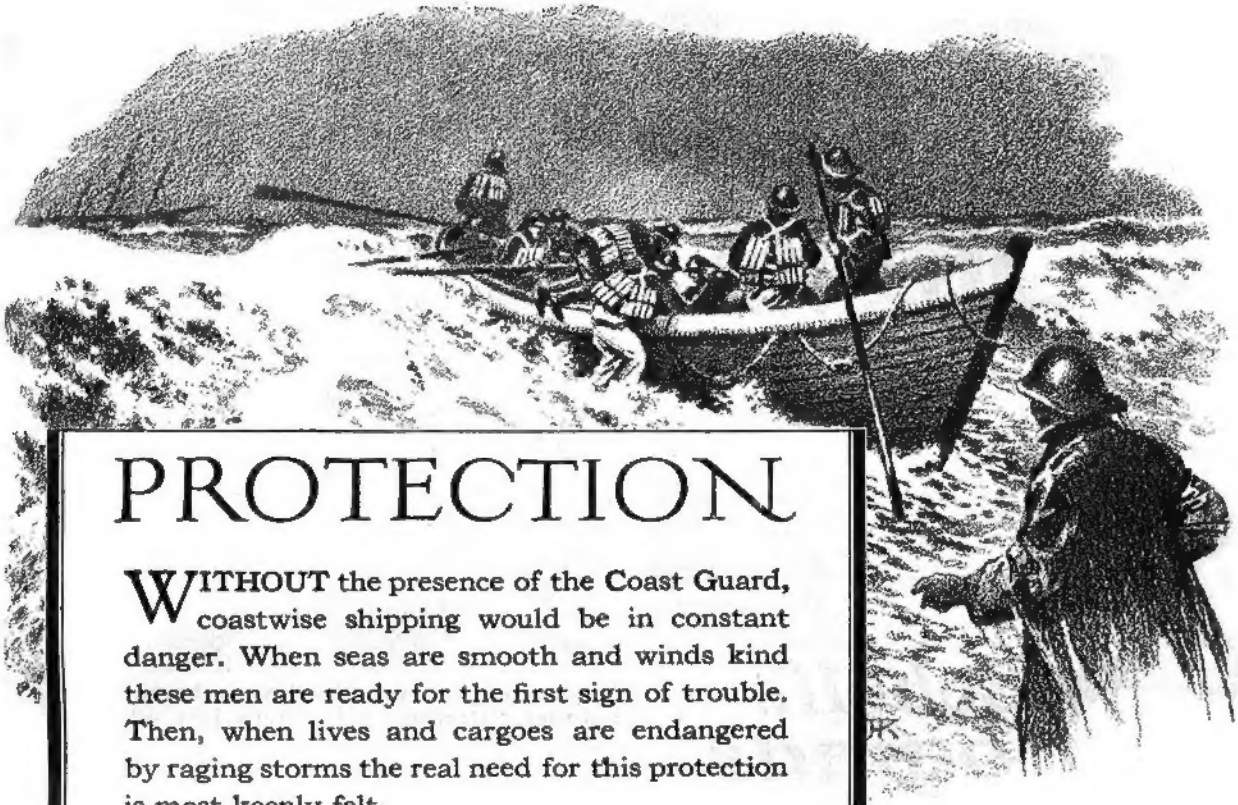

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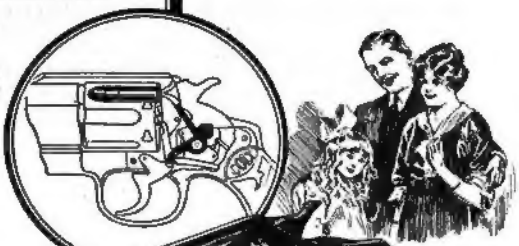

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